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Preview: Ken G. Hall's autobiography
Playscript: Jack Hibberd's *The Overcoat*
Focus on South Australia

Australia's magazine
of the performing arts
May 1977, \$1.95

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Theatre

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Australia

Directed
by Ken G. Hall

Special pre-publication
Book offer. See p.80

#COMMENT#

Australian talent in Australian commercial theatre suddenly seems to be burgeoning. At *Eleonor Live* with its Australian cast, probably the biggest venture of 1977, here, we hear, won outstanding praise from its organisers the Americans, who up to recently think the original cast wasn't as good as this one, and Mosser Brodnick and Edgley have already found it a financially rewarding experience. Parachute Productions are also very happy about the way *Some Time Next Year*, with Geanna Blumfeld and Nancy Hayes, has been going on its nationwide tour. Wilton Morley, managing director of Parachute, is convinced that what Australians want is to see Australians — not the TV show artists from Britain and America who are still being forced upon them by those who think that Australia is a better alternative to Brighton for pre-War End try-outs — and a lot sooner. Parachute aren't just pushing the home-grown product because of a sense of nationalism forerun and idealism, but because they feel that from now on this is what makes business sense: it is what will put brains on seats. Ken Brodnick obviously agrees where *The Two of Us* and *All That Jazz* is concerned — perhaps the producers of *The Two of Us* are wishing they had more faith John Ware and Sheila Macneil (of *The Swans*) and *The Rat Patrol* don't seem to be dragging in the crowds as expected. The critical response has been so negative in Melbourne that the promoters are apparently thinking of never touring that kind of production there again.

If the Australian content is booming in the commercial world, how is it faring in the subsidised theatres at present? The Old Tote are doing well with a healthy Australian bias at the Parade, and three classics, two Russian and one Australian (*Yvan's The Jew of a New York Paper*) at their "classics" venue the Drama Theatre. The MTC has two Australian plays at Russell Street, but at the Athenaeum, where they have stated it will be "possible to 'rob shoulders' with great writing... that has something to say for all time", of the four plays not one is Australian. They may not be as long-established as the works from older countries than ours, but surely we too have produced classic works that speak down through place and time, and surely they have more relevance in our way of life?

This segregation of the Australian from the "classics" would seem to be going against what is in the founding charter of

the Australia Council, the giving of a national character to Australian art. If this means any reference to what great funding is like, it is worth considering what policies of excluding Australian plays from the ranks of "the great" and "the classic" are doing to our drama's national identity.

The School for Scandal opened both the MTC and the SATC 1977 seasons, in probably comparisons were made and it seems the Adelaide production came off considerably better. The SATC is to a great extent in the hands of Englishmen from this year, with Colin George as artistic director, Roger Chapman as head of TLE, and Rodney Ford as designer, and indeed all have established their art as modernists very quickly and impressively since arriving. However sparking the productions, though, there is the worry that Adelaide's major theatre company will be relying too heavily on European standards, like the *Scandal* and *The Cherry Orchard* that start its season. Are the goals of subsidised theatre following the last limit is basic to commercial theatre, that of getting the maximum audience, and not looking enough to them, in other ways, privileged positions of being able to consider before audience-ratings, the importance of the national artistic content of the plays they can put on?

Adelaide has always liked to feel that with her less the taste appreciation of the arts, and especially the theatre arts, after all, they've built the Festival Centre to prove it. But is Adelaide going the hoped-of good PR? This month we have an interview with that past-master of PR, Don Dunstan, who tells about his arts policies. The Festival Centre complex is already constructed and the South Australian Theatre Company announced, so are its project director and his production.

As Mr Dunstan has often shown, good presentation, though it may not be overdoing, certainly helps a lot, especially when there's also something good to be presented. We (as you may have noticed) think Australian theatre is good and therefore deserves to be presented as well as possible, but new partnership with Melbourne promoter Norman Field is enabling Theatre Australia to become a much better-looking organism. We hope that this will help us to act as a more effective ambassador for the theatre arts of this country, both at home and abroad, where our own brand and style of theatre, writers, actors, directors and designers must become an important force and one to be reckoned with.

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people they once knew.

My mother always stocks the cupboard when we go away. I have two friends who have drinking problems. For I've lived on film directors just like that. They are like an actress I know, seemingly delightful at parties, but you wouldn't want her as your best friend. I know a professor who does funny voices and moves furniture around. Why would someone offer their wife to their best friend? Do you know anybody who's done that? Does anybody know anyone who has affairs with men as well as women?

Everybody is enjoying themselves. The room begins to sound like a pyrotechnics encounter group without the green grass. One by one they slip tentatively into their characters as jokers, bandits, cowboy boots and cork shoes. The wouldn't-be a turn into wouldn't be.

Obviously part of the barrier is broken down because we've shared that childhood thing. I think it comes out of a sense of righteous indignation. A kind of Scorpio thing. It's constant paranoia, isn't it?

I don't think calling someone a clown is all that awful. Yes it is. I was always called a clown at school and it used to rile me. You're a clown, Bert. Deep down I think he knows his film aren't very good either. Am I joking or serious here? Wouldn't I go and help? Would I give you a kiss? I feel funny sitting. Then try standing. Where?

There is a distant pause. All look to the director for direction. Once again he guides them back into finding their own. "Try it again. See how it feels. Let it come naturally. Just try to remember what you're trying to say in this scene."

They begin to try out various moments of their own. The prevailing atmosphere of happy concentrated involvement, I notice, is very productive. Our director sits like a smiling anchor at the side of the chalk line and gently pushes each to contribute towards defining the underlying motivations and attitudes behind each scene and line. Even the moves and actions are related back to intent.

"How would you feel under all these sheets?" I think that I'll just let those. Don't worry about the most moves yet. Andie a bit and see how you feel. Take a moment to think of everything that occurs so you before you ask them to. SALLY, MAKE WHAT A SURPRISE! JILL, I KNOW IT'S A CLICHE BUT YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED A BIT.

"No don't sit there, that's the coffee tray."

Said by happy god, the gaps are filled in and each character is placed in living, breathing, drinking, conspiring, hubbubbing, the somebody-we-all-know-somewhere reality.

Our director, slowly rubbing his throat, then pressures us that there is no rush to find all the answers yet, that we are all re-

olved in a growing process and that some of the larger truths will only come later in their own time. Everybody looks happily forward to that time.



By the end of the second week, the play is beginning to take some sort of dimly moving shape. Our director, I notice, now begins to start to mould that shape.

"Hold it. Remember the sense of what he's thinking. Did you do the dishes out there? Did they make you feel good? What are you both doing in that little parcel? How do you feel? Who's dominating? Think to yourself every time you say a line, 'How does that grab you?' Try coming live between each line. Use those phrases."

Try following her around as you talk.

Let's remember the effect on the audience. Let's lead them along and then shock them. OK, let's try it again, keeping all those things in mind."



It is week three of my life as an observer. Scorpio are down. Lines are not. Objections



NEWMED (060 5003)

Upholster: Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare. Director, John Bell, designer, Kim Carpenter. With Neil Fingleton as Malvolio, Peter Cagell as Feste, Barry Otto as Orsino, Anna Velkova as Olivia, Russell Knight as Viola, Drew Fingleton as Aguecheff. (From 22 Apr.)

Downstairs: Remains by Richard Bradshaw, *The Carpenter's Report* by John Summerson and *The Flow* by M.J. Perren. All directed by Richard Wharmston. (From 7 May)

OLD TOTE (060 6122)

Drama Theatre, Opera House: Caterer and Chopaneer by George Bernard Shaw. Director, William Redmond, designer, Shaun Gilroy and Mike Bridges. With Robert Davis, James Gordon, Ron Graham, Jackie Kell, Richard Meekle. (From 20 Apr.)

Friends Theatre: The Ardennes by Ben Jonson. Director, John Clark, designer, Adrian Lees. With Bruce Spence, John Kinsella, Peter Whitford, Stanley Walsh, Celia Croft. (To 24 May)

Q THEATRE, Perth (047 21 5735)

Back Up Four Daughters by Henry Fielding, adapted by Bernard Miles of the Malthus Theatre, London. Designer, Arthur Dicks, director, Darlene Warburton. With Ron Mackinnon as Mr Squareson, Leo Taylor as Mr. Vanders as Mrs Squareson, Leo Taylor as Rumbold, Ron Roper as Constant, Louise Wilkinson as Helen. (Malthus Rehabilitation Centre, Parramatta, 20-24 April, Railway Institute, Perth, 25-30 April)

What The Spider Saw by Joe Orton. Director, Adam Salter, designer, Arthur Dicks. With Ron Mackinnon, Vola Vandens, Leo Taylor, Ron Roper, Louise Wilkinson. (Railway Institute, Perth, 31-22 May, Civic Centre, Bankstown, 25-29 May)

RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY, Wagga (069 21 2134)

Diamond Study by Jon Wain and Blaud Simpson. Director, Terry O'Connell, designer, Fred Lyon. (14-24 Apr.)

ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL OPERA COMPANY (067 46136)

Trial by Jury and The Stranger by Gilbert and Sullivan. (22, 23 Apr.)

ST JAMES' LUNCHTIME PLAYHOUSE (023 8576)

The Coach by Mary Banks. Directors, Peter Williams and Ida Marchant. (To 13 May)

SEYMOUR CENTRE (062 0335)

York: Gullberg and Solance. (To 30 Apr.)

Downstairs: Sunny South by George Donnell. Director, David Mann. A Sydney University Dramatic Society production. (27 Apr.-14 May)

SPEAKEASY THEATRE RESTAURANT, Kensington (063 7442)

Son of Naked Fear by Barry Cresson.

THEATRE ROYAL (021 6377)

Leader: A one-man show on the life and songs of Harry Lauder. Devised and presented by Jimmy Logan. (To 7 May.)

Donor in Love by Richard Gordon. Produced by Gary Van Egnmond and Paul Duntz. With Robin Newell, Geoffrey Davis. (From 9 May.)

UNIVERSITY OF NSW OPERA (062 3412)

Secret Theatre: Joan of Arc (Verdi) in Italian. Director, David Bonham, musical director, Roger Conell. (28, 31 May.)

**QUEENSLAND****ARTS THEATRE (H 2344)**

Now the Other Half: Lovers by Alan Ayckbourn. Director, Kevin Redbourne, designer, Jennifer Redbourne. With Frank Foster, Jack B. Brown, Franca Fostini, Mary Anne Houlton, Rob Phillips, Alan Hooper, Teresa Phillips, Gabriela Scott, William Featherstone, Michael Downey, Mary Featherstone, Christine Kelly. (14 Apr.-14 May.)

Abolard and Heloise by Ronald Miller. Director, Ian Thomson, designer, Ian Thomson. With Ian Grady, Toni Featherstone, Jeff Hagen, Denise Taylor, Dorothy Russell. (19 May-18 June)

CAMERATA (06 6561)

A Winter's Tale by William Shakespeare. Director, David Gahan, designer, Clare Beaumont. With Ken Parker, Wendy Nugent, Alan Rhodes, Richard Michael, Rahyn Torrey, Rosemary Paine, Stephen Sorenson, Paul Rubin, Bill West. (7 Apr.-7 May, Ararat, St Lucia.)

(From 19 May: *The Seagull* by Chekov.)

HER MAJESTY'S (023 3777)

Donor in Love by Richard Gordon. Produced by Gary van Egnmond and Paul Duntz. With Robin Newell and Geoffrey Davis. (16 Apr.-7 May.)

LA ROUTE (36 2256)

Grass by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey. Director, Graeme Johnston. With Sam Moe, Sally Baumgarten, Dale Day, Jo Har die, Graeme Hattack, Paul Hader. (29 Apr.-4 June.)

QUEENSLAND BALLET (029 3335)

Twelfth Night Theatre. (23, 24)

Spot Off. A programme of ballets choreographed by members of the company. (18-21 May.)

QUEENSLAND LIGHT OPERA COMPANY

The Goodbye by Gilbert and Sullivan. Director, David MacFarlane, designer, Max Herby. With Gerald Sloan, Les McAdams, Marcon Howard, Doreen Morrow, Ted Koller, Mary Blake. *Idolwala*, by Gilbert and Sullivan.

QUEENSLAND OPERA COMPANY (023 7548)

Six Pasquale (Donizetti, in English). On pause near in Apr. (Horne Hall, 30 Apr., Townsville, 21 Apr., Inverell, 23 Apr., Cairns, 25 Apr., Rockhampton, 28 Apr., Gladstone, 30 Apr.) Producer, John Thompson, designer, James Redwood, musical director, Griens Young. Max Irwin as Don Pasquale, Arthur Johnson as Ernesto, Sally Robertson as Norma, Denis White as the Notary.

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (023 3661)

Closed until The Last of the Amishmen opens 22 June.

TWELFTH NIGHT (32 5889)

Swearing's Affair by James McDonald, David Voss and Robert Gottlieb. Director, John Whitley, designer, Jennifer Condon. (14 Apr.-14 May.)

Tom Sawyer directed by Jon James.

**SOUTH AUSTRALIA****ARTS THEATRE (07 5775)**

Now the Other Half: Lovers by Alan Ayckbourn. Director, Peter Williams. (21 Apr.-7 May.)

A Children's Show by Ian and Pamela Johnson. (14-28 May.)

FESTIVAL CENTRE (31 2282)

The Space Jack and the Agony by Ron Pemberton and Dennis de Marre. Director, Brian Dehman. Adelaide Theatre Group Production. (From 1 May)

QTHEATRE (023 3661)

Mad Like Lazarus by Graham Shaw. Director, Bill O'Day. (20 Apr.-21 May: Wed and Sat only.)

The Reluctant Suburban by William Douglas Home. Director, Frank Gargro. (From 1 June.)

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN THEATRE COMPANY (31 5131)

Jury Rush with Ruth Caudwell. Director, Colin George, designer, Rodney Ford. (3-21 May.)

My My Dear by Arthur Miller. Director, David Williamson, designer, John Gervino. (26 May-18 June.)

**TASMANIA****THEATRE ROYAL (H 6366)**

Count Dracula. Director, John Unsworth. (To 30 Apr.)

University Show: The Old Nick Theatre Company. (6-21 May.)

The Execution of Benjamin Franklin by

Steve J. Spence, Director, Richard Whelan, With Gordon Chater, (26 May-4 June)



VICTORIA

ALEXANDER THEATRE (043 2826)
Romeo and Juliet Victorian Shakespeare Company, Director, Harold Rogers With Chris and Judith Crooks, (To 30 Apr)

AUSTRALIAN OPERA
PRINCESS THEATRE (062 1355)
Melanie Safely (Proctor) in Italian, (34 Apr)

Producer, John Copley, designers, Michael Sammiti (costumes) and Henry Bordon (sets), conductor, Carlo Felice Ciliano, Maria Sghedi as Butterfly, Lamberto Piretti as Pinkerton, Ronald Macraeger as Sharpless, Lesley Seader as Suzuki
Carmen (Burt) in French, (21, 23, 25, 27, 30 Apr, 3, 5, 11 May, 14 May (mat), 16 May)

Producer and designer, Tom Logwood, conductor, Russell Churnell, Heather Begg, Margaret Elton or Suzanne Steel as Carmen, Ron Stevens as Don Jose, Isabel Buchanan or Dolores Cambridge as Micaela, Raymond Myers or Peter van der Stoep as Escamillo

Falshin (Berthoff) in German, (22, 26, 28 Apr, 30 Apr (mat), 5, 7, 9, 13, 18 May)
Designer, Alan Luss, conductor, Carlo Felice Ciliano, Leon Koppal-Warner or Narelle Grant as Leonore, Beryl Farina or Cynthia Johnson as Jacquino, John Shaw as Pavarotti, Neil Warren-Smith or Donald Shanks as Rocco, Robert Allman as Grand Duke as Don Fernand
La Boheme (Delibes) in French, (29 Apr, 2, 4 May, 7 May (mat))

Producer Norman Ayton, designer, Desmond Digby, conductor, Peter Robinson Richards, Bruce as Leona, Helen Wilson as Gerald, Robert Allman as Malatesta, Margareta Elton as Maddalena, Graeme Goss as Hedy, John Pringle or Peter van der Stoep as Ferruccio

The Marriage of Figaro (Mozart) in English, (12, 14, 17, 19 May)

Producer, John Copley, designers, Michael Sammiti (costumes) and Henry Bordon (sets), conductor, Peter Robinson Cynthia Johnson as Susanna, Marco Grant as the Countess, Jennifer Berthoff as Charlotte, Roma Rankin as Marcelina, Ronald Macraeger as Figaro, John Pringle as the Count, Robert Goss as Basilio, Neil Warren-Smith as Bartolo

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (047 7172)

From Factory From Theatre
Star Lap — It's Cigarettes for Lighning By Kennedy Steve Murrell
Director, Paul Hampton (To 24 Apr)

The Wild Family Show (From 5 May)

COMEDY THEATRE (047 3211)
The Pleasure of Mr Company by Samuel Taylor assisted by Pamela Orr Skinner
Paul Elliott presented in association with Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust and Playbill (Am) Pty Ltd in arrangement with J.C. Williamson Productions Ltd
With Douglas Fairbanks Jr, Stanley Holloway, David Langton, Carol Kaye (To 7 May)

London, London, created and performed by Jenny Lagan. Presented by Paul Elliott (From 11 May)

GUILD THEATRE, MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY (047 4186)
Four Pies by J.M. Burns. A new, adult production of the original script, (19-23 Apr and 26-30 Apr)

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (062 3211)
The Twentieth and All That Goes A musical collection with John Dudeney, Caroline Gillmer and John O'Malley
Musical director, Michael Trapp, choreography, John Fitzgerald, design, Trina Parlan. Presented by J.C. Williamson Productions Ltd and Michael Edgley International Pty. Ltd. (From 16 Apr)

LA MAMA (317 6883)
Sylvette Swisher A night of experimental music. Chris Martin and Warren Bart (To 24 Apr)
Music with Meyer Connections, David Tully and Dore Dore, cinema, James Claydon

EAST LAUGH (049 8238)
4 Crazy Things Directed by Darryl Williamson. With Betty Babbel, Robert East, Peter Crighton, Harry Tovey

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY 045 1100
Afternoon Theatre School for Scandal by R.B. Sheridan. Directed by Ray Lawler, designed Tony Tripp (To 23 Apr)
Ann and the Psychiatrist by Sam O'Casey. Director, Ray Lawler, designer, Tony Tripp (From 5 May)

Revell Street The Fall Guy by Linda Anderson. Directed and designed by Mick Rodger. With Murray Drake, Terence Donovan, Norman Kaye and Stephen Oldfield (To 21 May)
The Club by David Williamson. Director, Rodney Fisher, designer, Susan Gorton (From 26 May)

THEATRE IN EDUCATION
Life in a Lane by Spenser by Jonathan Hardy
The Waterman Rebel by John Powers. Director, Greg Shaw
Man Friday by Adrian Mitchell. Directed and designed by Robert Luss. Company A. Melbourne, 18 Apr-6 May, Maitland 23 May-3 June. Company B. Waverley, Maitland, 18 Apr-6 May, Doncaster, 23 May-3 June

MORELAND THEATRE RESTAURANT (36 5643)
Going to Town A musical revue produced by Tony Scanlon (Moon-Sun)

PLAY BOX THEATRE (042 2911)
Paranormal Paranormal A Gillman and Sullivan musical revue by Ian Taylor. Director, Neil Craig, designer, David Brown. With John Swag and John Trueman. Presented by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in association with the M.L. Centre, Paul Elliott and Marion Stamp Theatre (From 25 May)

REGENT PALACE (419 5045)
The Rocky Horror Show Presented by Harry M. Miller (Throughout May)

ST MARTIN'S THEATRE (054 4000)
Leading Lady A musical revue presented by Eric Dore and William Jar. With Jill Parryman, Bryon Davies and Darrell Hakes

TOTAL THEATRE (063 4996)
Let My People Come A musical celebration of us by Neil Wilson Jar. Directed by Peter Blay, presented by Eric Dore

WINDSOR RIDGES (31 6978)
Son of Naked Poet by Tony Sandler and Gary Riley



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

HOLE IN THE WALL (81 2465)
Crossing Niagara by Alison Allgrove. Director, John Milnes. A two-hander with Robert van Marckelsberg and Alan Hughes (20 Apr-14 May)

Twentieth by Tom Stoppard. Director, John Milnes. Starring Edgar Mitchell (28 May-18 Jun)

PLAYHOUSE (23 3444)
Abner's Friends by Alan Ayckbourn. Director, Aaron Moons. With Carol Scates, Alan Cassell, Linda Wright, Kath Taylor, Ian Nicholls, Tiffany Evans (21 Apr-14 May)

GREEN ROOM, Playhouse
Adapted by David Rudkin. Director, Andrew Ross. With Pippa Williamson, Adele Lewis, Dennis Miller, Ian Scott. Adults only (22 Apr-14 May)

BALLET SCHOOL performances at the CONCERT HALL

Street Games by Walter Goss
Four and the Wind by Benjamin Britten. A newly choreographed version by Robin Hong
Adult Performances (22, 23 Apr)

WATT HAYMAN THEATRE (08 3212)
Arford and Helbow by Ronald Miller. Director, Tony Nichols (4-21 May)

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN OPERA COMPANY (71 045 or 71 8333)
Purk Entertainment Centre
The Mikado (Gilbert & Sullivan) (7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 May)
Producer, Ross Crossley. With Jane Strickland, Deana Olsen, Thomas Edgwards

QUOTES & QUERIES

THEATRE FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

DIANE SHARPE, production manager, Old Time Theatre Company and ATYP

"There are two purposes to my visit overseas. The first relates to, but is not, the direct outcome of the Armadale Project. It shall be looking at how the performing arts are developing in disadvantaged areas — which, inevitably, in the overseas, have industrial troubles and high migrant populations.

"There is a shift in developing such community activity here, so it is well to see the situation in Manchester and Newcastle upon Tyne — what's working and especially what's not working.

"The other purpose is to ensure arts administrators overseas in England, which will include the general meeting of regional theatre in Wexford. I have severe doubts about the worth and efficiency of arts administration courses as they are set up anywhere in the world. The three- or six-month crash courses at Harvard and Yale have numerous drawbacks. Twelve months' placement in a theatre company here just isn't enough. Trainees need three years of practical tutelage by solid theory — an apprenticeship in fact.

"More courses in this area are being set up here, in Victoria and South Australia. What I want to do is find the strengths and weaknesses of what is happening in English polytechnics and Arts Council courses so that we can incorporate the best and, hopefully, avoid the pitfalls here."

AFTER THE GOLD

RAY LAWREN, playwright: "The Doll Trilogy is to be published in October as a handbook threatened by Carraway Press. At the moment I'm waiting it for publication, the stage directions now have come at the front of the play and there are certain scenes to sharpen up now I've seen the whole three run together.

"There had been sketches all along the way in the long process of writing the plays, and though I wouldn't personally attempt to assess them, I am very pleased now it is complete. I suppose my greatest response was one of relief, when they ran together, that they did integrate.

"Someone said, 'Why not write the whole 17 scenarios?' But that would be ridiculous. It is now whole, there has been definitely no entry. There has been expansion, too, of the traditional style, but it is not another 17 years onwards but 17 years back — and hence the style. I could have written one as an expressionistic piece

but it would have jelled instantly. I can understand that people say, 'Why write it at all?' but not that other parts should have been written using more modern techniques.

"I work in close touch with the grim-rocks, in rhythm and along. But even the way the Doll is now played has changed, though that upward look of Australian speech remains. Writing like that, I feel I couldn't write a modern Australian play because of the change in grass-roots modes of speaking. O'Casey has the same concern, and that my love for his work and the 10 years I spent in Ireland makes especially pleasing to direct *June and the Playmate* (opens 3 May), the first of his plays I've tackled. After being away from practical theatre for so long, it is good to be back. One can lose touch. But John (Shaner) believes I must have time off to write more — but not as the Doll.

ADMINISTRATION

ELIZABETH SWEETING: "An Arts Administration course, business-oriented and of a year's duration is currently being planned in Adelaide. Anyone interested in being kept in touch with on developments should write to Elizabeth Sweeting, c/o Arts Council of SA, 458 Morphett Street, Adelaide. It would be helpful if inquiries could include details of qualifications and past and present experience.

"I have worked in Adelaide now for one year and have made two previous visits. Working around Australia in the arts I have found that there is a need for further training in business subjects and with secondment to arts organisations, as well as in the performing arts, music and the visual arts. As an organisation developing such resources we must be able to take our place alongside the business organisations and funding bodies with which we are connected."

BACK TO PERTH

RAYMOND SMITH: "First of all, I'm very flattered that the University of Western Australia has chosen me to be its first director-in-residence. The appointment starts on 23 June and lasts for six weeks; the university wanted three months, but I couldn't manage that. I'm also very moved, as I was a part of those productive years in the autumn when university drama there flourished as in no other state. And I'm excited as the university is full of very varied venues for productions. I will be conducting a series of workshops for all students, not just those in the English Department, and some

informal lecturing, culminating at the end with a production possibly with both students and some professional actors. This will relate to a suitable choice related to students, or else something quite different. Two plays I'm very interested in at the moment are Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and a little-known Strindberg called *The Boys of Heaven*.

"I'm always delighted to return to Perth; the audiences are in many ways more demanding. They never took to the subscription scheme, so theatre really has to entertain and persuade to get people in, unlike most capitals, where there are people all through a run because they have already bought their tickets. Word of mouth is the way things work over there. We've now sold out before the reviews even come out!"

SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

HARRY GORDON, director, Ensemble Theatre: "We were approached by the New York agent of *Model of Honor* Ray by Tom Cole (a staff pleasure change from customary procedures). We read the play. 'You asked, may we?' There were problems of course, including setting, integrity and the fact that it was a very short play. A long one-act.

"The cast? We found it in Arne Goldman, Lindsay Pearson and Fred Smith.

"Whatever went with it, as something small, would have to match in some manner. Everyone at the Ensemble engaged in a frantic play-making spree. Suddenly it was there. A long-term project of actress Margo Brown — *Alison Mary Fagan* by David Saltzman and directed by Michael O'Reilly — and finally presented one Sunday night for an invited audience.

"Alison has become disturbed in her search for identity. The subject of *Model of Honor* has become disturbed mostly from being confronted by his identity. Would the plays work together?"

"Would they work at all? You tell us."

NEW HOME FOR HOPE

JOHN MILLSON, director, Hole-in-the-Wall Theatre: "The real problem facing the Hole at the moment is the budget of costs. We've been playing to full houses, but with a limited number of seats it's becoming a difficult situation. We're constantly looking for some suitable old building close to the city. Something I'm very excited about is the return of Western Australian Lady Nunn (of *The Box*) back to Perth for a season. Running as a little

might show concurrently with *Pravda*, in which she will have a part. Judy will be appearing in the famous one-woman show, Jean Cocteau's *The Mexican Fairy*, so she will be doing two shows a night!"

ASTONISHING UNBORN REPORT

DAVID BLENKINSOP, director, *Festival of Perth*: "You want a quote from me on planning next year's festival? The one, 1977, had some interesting results. In particular the Western Australian community supported its own companies very well and innovations such as the state theatre had excellent attendance. As for visiting companies, I think the APG presented an interesting play, and might have done a lot better in a different venue. I suppose a lot of people were put off by the reputation of 'effete culture' as a slogan, and the small sample audience didn't respond. As for the Old Tote, even though *The Plough* and *The Stars* had a distinguished director, a distinguished cast and a distinguished designer, it drew less than 18 per cent attendance. There could have been a more worthy effort from Australia's leading theatre company."

DREAM COMETRUE

DAVID ADENBROKE, director, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "I'm very excited and flattered that Tony Pevens and the Adelaide Festival committee want me. They said my production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Perth Festival last year was by far the most original and pleasurable event in the festival. As a result of seeing it, they are sending the company to present the show in Adelaide as the inaugural production in the new Amphitheatre of the Festival Complex. At the same time, it is planned to take the production in tow, with both professionals and students."

ASTONISHING ORIGINAL PLAY

At the beginning of 1975 a new play opened the Black Theatre season in Redfern, Sydney. This play was *The Cellarman* by Robert Merrin. Nine years later it is being presented by the Aboriginal Arts Board at the South Australian Theatre for a season of six weeks beginning Friday, 29 April. The director is George Ogilvie, the designer Wendy Dakin, with film segments by Gill Armstrong and a cast including Brian Syron, Janine Saunders and Max Cullen.

GEORGE OGILVIE, freelance director, comments: "The invitation to direct *The Cellarman* has resulted in one of the most exciting projects for me in many years. Not only is the play one of the most important of significance for Australians today, dealing with the life of a repressed minority, their hopes, dreams and present confusion, but I consider Robert Merrin to be one of the finest playwrights to emerge in recent years. His grasp and understanding of both dialogue and character is the most astonishing when one realises that this is his first play."

POINTE PLAYS AND REVIEWS

JOHN BELL, artistic director, Nimrod: "Reviews and three Pointe plays may seem a change from Nimrod policy, but not actually. We are doing new Australian plays this year, as well as the two Shakespeare and Tennessee. Promoting the three as a perfect season was just a selling-point — and then done with a very large coupon in a very small check."

The two reviews are there because some plays have a longer life than the first and few weeks of the first run. It's a pity not to let larger audiences see them. And some plays have become in some sense landmarks of the Nimrod style: plays like *Mate and Brother*, *Disposers*, *Franklin* and *Black Ads* are ones we have become known for. I quite like the idea of building up a repertoire though I'm not saying that we will keep these around for years.

"If only touring were cheaper! It works with *Disposers* and *Brothers*, but anything beyond a four-hander we just couldn't manage. A Shakespeare is obviously out of the question. Without touring, the only way to get the plays before more people is to revive them. But it's a pity as if we're being considered, under the Opera Company, where virtually nothing is new."

It's a matter of trying to find variations on opening a new production after every three weeks on average. Even so, we are off patting in more time than a cat and we are tending to bore people up more quickly.

"And the future? I certainly don't want the building to get any bigger, it's fine as it stands, at least for the next five years."

LETTERS

I am writing to point out a mistake in your recently accurate reporting, in this instance, in the February-March issue.

"On up — *Films*" by Barry Lowe.

I refer to paragraph four and the film *Do*, in particular. "The film has been sold for a ludicrously small amount and is to undergo the supreme insult of being dubbed into American."

The discrepancy was brought to my attention by the Australian Film Commission's agent in New York, Jim Henry, and the American distributor house who have bought the American distribution rights. The distributor is not dubbing into American, but is re-recording tracks to make the Australian accents clearer for American ears. He also intends making the picture sound deeper to increase the film's rock appeal.

Further, the deal negotiated was for a substantial "up-front" payment and thereafter a percentage of the box office, so that the sales really will depend on the film's success in the States. The talk was not cash outright, as suggested in your article.

RAA FRANCIS,

Director,

Public Relations,

Australian Film Commission.

David Ogilvie is his comments on the Australian Opera's performance of

But we do need more money. On the one hand, to fund "commando troops" to take theatre to schools and university campuses. There is just such an enormous potential audience in educational establishments who need to be brought into contact with theatre. On the other hand, our small staff is working for wages that are far below parity with those of similar jobs, trades and crafts outside the industry.

"It's comforting to develop and things are running as smoothly as ever, even if it is a more time-consuming way. Each director likes to have a set period of each season — but I think this year I'll be hard-pressed to find a stop."

OPERA POINT

Peter Hennings has been appointed general manager of the Australian Opera, the appointment being effective from October.

CHARLES J. BERG, chairman, Australian Opera, comments: "Peter Hennings has had a brilliant career and can go no further at present in Britain, having been at Sadler's Wells, their general administrator of Scottish Opera."

"With double the budget of Scottish Opera available to him here, we are confident his presence will help further develop and consolidate Australian Opera."

"There is no one available at present in Australia with such wealth of experience and ability (apart from John Worch, who resigned recently). We are delighted that Peter Hennings will be joining us."

Commentary: *Australian Film Monthly*, writes of the conductor Russell Churnell "depriving the solemn of their applause." I was not present at the performance in question, but would nevertheless condemn your reviewer's "star performer" attitude, which can only reduce the presentation of any opera to a series of virtuoso displays. Even an opera such as *Camere*, with its number of set-pieces, benefits immensely by being allowed its dramatic and musical continuity to be preserved, uninterrupted by the hosts of state clapping so beloved of the Sydney opera set. No work is left untouched: once the indistinguishable and readily discarded snippets direct that timid chord, or once the singers seem to have reached their labours temporarily, or once the curtain makes the slightest motion in a downward direction, down go the chocolate, and they're off. Any music that happens to be playing at the time is, of course, lost. And Mr Ogilvie apparently seeks to perpetuate this situation and automatically by shaming a conductor who "promised on regardless of the fact that the singers and orchestra were inaudible to the audience", I trust that when we are told that Mr Churnell "settled down as the afternoon progressed", that does not mean that he gave up the struggle, it can only hope, despite the enormous odds, that other conductors take up the challenge.

BARAN FITZGERALD,
Neutral Bay, NSW.

Theatre Forum 77

This years 'Playwrights' Conference now called *Theatre Forum* will be held at the A.N.U. Canberra from 15-29 May. It looks like being the most exciting yet as Richard Wherrett, the artistic director, and Bill Shanahan, the administrator explain.

It has become clear at the course of the four conferences that the event exists on a far wider scale than just the workshoping of plays. It is a coming together of all key personnel in theatre in Australia, hence, we have entitled on a new title for this years conference Theatre Forum.

The workshoping of plays remains the central focal point of the event, around which seminars, discussions and additional play-readings take place.

The aim of the conference is to give promising new writers practical playwrighting skills by working on their scripts with top professional actors and directors in the rehearsal situation. Scripts

are submitted to the conference playwrighting committee from all over Australia, and from these, a final six are chosen for workshop at the conference. This year, however, eight plays will be workshoped, four being one-act plays and four full-length plays. In addition, new playwrights whose plays have not been chosen for workshoping, but whose work, it is felt, shows talent, are invited to attend the conference as observers in the workshop programme. The opportunity to attend the conference as a paying observer is also open to any member of the public.

The conference committee feels that the work it is doing is of great importance, not only because of the training and practical

experience that it affords new playwrights, but also because it brings the playwright into contact with professional people who will be able to help and guide him in the future. As well, it brings members of the profession together for stimulation and the exchange of ideas — an exchange which, given Australia's geographical problems, would be otherwise impossible.

In terms of these areas of activity, this year's conference is shaping up as one of the most exciting yet.

The 35 plays submitted were of a particularly high standard, and the final selection includes such notable writers as Steve J. Spears, Kenneth Ross, Roger Pulvers and Terri Gunning. Plays to be work-

National Theatre Awards



The 1976 National Theatre Awards will be presented at the 1977 Theatre Forum, National Playwrights' Conference, in May. These are to be professional awards voting solely on the votes of members of the theatre industry. Actors, directors, designers, writers and stage crew are therefore asked to vote on the nominations listed below, which are the result of a national poll of critics. There is an extra space for those who wish to vote for someone other than those nominated.

Forms received after 10 May 1977 cannot be considered.

If you are eligible to vote, fill in the form below (or make out a list) and post to 1976 National Theatre Awards, Theatre Australia, 7 Percival Place, New Lightfoot Heights, NSW 2085.

If you are not eligible to vote, you may still wish to fill in the form and keep it so that you can compare your selections with the results of the poll.

	BEST ACTOR	BEST ACTRESS	BEST DIRECTOR
NOUVEAU THEATRE	<input type="checkbox"/> Alan Cassell <input type="checkbox"/> Geoff Gilbey <input type="checkbox"/> Nicholas Kent <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Helen Hough <input type="checkbox"/> Joan Sadiq <input type="checkbox"/> Pat Skerrowan <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> John Mahon <input type="checkbox"/> Mike Morris <input type="checkbox"/> Anne Warner <input type="checkbox"/>
THEATRE AUSTRALIA	<input type="checkbox"/> Peter Cresswell <input type="checkbox"/> Gary Filer <input type="checkbox"/> Max Galloway <input type="checkbox"/> Jonathan Hardy <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Sandy Goble <input type="checkbox"/> Irene Hammett <input type="checkbox"/> Patricia Kennedy <input type="checkbox"/> Evelyn Knight <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Len Johns <input type="checkbox"/> Ross Laidler <input type="checkbox"/> Mark Rudge <input type="checkbox"/> Lindsay Smith <input type="checkbox"/>
THEATRE AUSTRALIA	<input type="checkbox"/> Bill Farley <input type="checkbox"/> Neil Fitzpatrick <input type="checkbox"/> John Hargreaves <input type="checkbox"/> Dennis Oliver <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Elizabeth Humphreys <input type="checkbox"/> Christine Goss <input type="checkbox"/> Julie Kiering <input type="checkbox"/> Melinda Ward <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Mark Lavery <input type="checkbox"/> Rodney Fisher <input type="checkbox"/> George Gifford <input type="checkbox"/> Peter Griffiths <input type="checkbox"/>
THEATRE AUSTRALIA	<input type="checkbox"/> Brian Bell <input type="checkbox"/> David L. Bonding <input type="checkbox"/> Douglas Hedge <input type="checkbox"/> Ian Jones <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Anthony Gosses <input type="checkbox"/> Judith McArthur <input type="checkbox"/> Pat Thompson <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> David L. Bonding <input type="checkbox"/> Richard Lotherington <input type="checkbox"/> Ann MacCallum <input type="checkbox"/> Brian Patten <input type="checkbox"/>
THEATRE AUSTRALIA	<input type="checkbox"/> Gordon L. Bond <input type="checkbox"/> John Lewis <input type="checkbox"/> John Gaden <input type="checkbox"/> John McTernan <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Kate Fitzpatrick <input type="checkbox"/> Marlene Hayes <input type="checkbox"/> Rubya Davis <input type="checkbox"/> Jackie Weaver <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> John Bell <input type="checkbox"/> Martin Dwyer <input type="checkbox"/> Jan Dwyer <input type="checkbox"/> Richard Wherrett <input type="checkbox"/>

shopped at this year's conference are

Don't Pickle Against the Wind Male, by Kenneth Ross, *King Richard*, by Steve J. Spears, *Wardrobe*, by Tim Gooding, *Stratagems*, by Malcolm Farnell, *East*, by Timothy Carroll, *The Two-Way Mirror*, by Dublin Oswald, *Dream Girl*, by Ruth Hartman, *Parables*, by Roger Palmer.

Authors participating in this year's conference include some of the top names in Australian Theatre: Jacki Weaver, Monica Maughan, Kim McQuade, Angela Ponch, Janice Fox, Celia De Bugh, Chris Heywood, Tony Linvalley-Jones, Kevin Miles, Robin Kennedy, Alan Edwards and David Waters.

The artistic director of the Queensland Theatre Company, Alan Edwards, and author/director Ron Blair are two of the four directors who will lead the workshoping of the plays at this year's conference.

Dramaturges assisting the new playwrights include eminent Australian playwright Dorothy Hewett and the chairman of the playwrights committee of the conference, Helen van der Poorten.

The conference is particularly honoured

to have among its special guests John Osborne, one of Britain's most distinguished playwrights for more than 20 years, whose plays include *Look Back in Anger*, *The Entertainer*, *Luther*, *A Patriot for Me*, *Widow of Sen*, and more recently, *Watch it Come Down*.

We are also excited to have one of Britain's most controversial playwrights of the seventies, Howard Brenton, author of *Chorus in Love*, *Arising*, *Magistrates*, a contemporary adaptation of *Measure for Measure* and *Proposals of Happiness* which was commissioned by the National Theatre in 1975.

As Osborne attended his premiere through the Royal Court Theatre in London, so has Howard Brenton who was resident director of the Royal Court in 1973-3.

Other guests so far confirmed are Helen Dawson, former drama critic of the *London Observer* and *Pilot* and *Playern*, Helen Mantega, general manager of H. M. Tennant (London), and Robin Talbot, a leading literary agent. Negotiations continue for another guest, hopefully from America or Europe.

The programme of the conference in-

cludes a daily seminar on all aspects of theatre production, politics and poetics. Some of the proposed subjects for discussion are:

- Artists without Unions
- Playwrights — Perceptions and Promotions
- The Fringe
- The Critics' Forum
- The Relationship between Unions and Management

Sponsors of seminars will include John Bell, Katherine Broome, Alan Buss, Graham Bylesell, Hilary Leonard, Kip Porteous, Ken Southgate, John Tarkin and David Williamson.

This year, in conjunction with the conference, the Australian Film and Television School will hold a workshop on all aspects of writing for the visual media. Participants in both conferences will meet freely and have opportunities to exchange ideas on formal and informal levels.

The conference will welcome any inquiries from interested parties. These inquiries should be made to Bill Shearman, Old Tooe Limited, P.O. Box 38, Broadmead, NSW, 2019 Tel. 669 6323.

WEST COAST	SOUTH EAST	SOUTH WEST	QUEENSLAND	NEW SOUTH WALES
<input type="checkbox"/> Bill Dowd <input type="checkbox"/> Graham Maxwell <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Steven Lind <input type="checkbox"/> Martin Jones <input type="checkbox"/> Oliver	<input type="checkbox"/> Annual Fanny <input type="checkbox"/> The Trial <input type="checkbox"/> Handful of Friends <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Peter Conger <input type="checkbox"/> Carol Porter <input type="checkbox"/> Kenneth Rowlett <input type="checkbox"/> Tony Trapp	<input type="checkbox"/> Emily Evans <input type="checkbox"/> Handful of Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Other Titles <input type="checkbox"/> A Toast to Mollie
<input type="checkbox"/> Anne French <input type="checkbox"/> Shane Curran <input type="checkbox"/> Peter Williams <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Lady Klara <input type="checkbox"/> Posh in Crown <input type="checkbox"/> Glory Pinks <input type="checkbox"/> Simon	<input type="checkbox"/> Young Mr. <input type="checkbox"/> Handful of Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Brothers	<input type="checkbox"/> Jennifer L. Lamberton <input type="checkbox"/> Peter Cooke <input type="checkbox"/> James Rutherford <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> The Deposition <input type="checkbox"/> Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know <input type="checkbox"/> A Toast to Mollie
<input type="checkbox"/> David Benson <input type="checkbox"/> Wendy Dawson <input type="checkbox"/> Larry Davidson <input type="checkbox"/> Doug Kargman <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Woody de Bugh <input type="checkbox"/> Jennifer McQuarrie <input type="checkbox"/> Elizabeth Mervin <input type="checkbox"/> Steve Spears <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Royce Franklin <input type="checkbox"/> Handful of Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Red Tulips <input type="checkbox"/> A Toast to Mollie	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Name _____

Address _____

Professional Status
(actor, writer, director etc.) _____

ON THE ADELAIDE



"The sadness . . . is that no one had the courage to design a theatre that took account of the age we live in"

After my official introduction to the Festival Centre, when only the main hall (designed to cope with every art form from symphony to opera to ballet to drama, to chamber music and solo recital) was on view, I was, I thought, just and needed in my prime. This I found, is not always the attitude Adelaide residents enjoy in a seasonal crisis.

When, some time after, I came over to inspect the almost-completed drama sections of the centre, the Playhouse, and, alas, a little later again, I came to the opening performance in the theatre. I was even more modest in prime.

Those attached to the Playhouse had led me around it exclusively, and where I was most impressed and full of praise for the luxury of the backstage accommodation for the players, and for the grand scale of the theatre company's permanent production and training areas, the theatre itself left me depressed.

Filled with doubts of the fly tower, of how capacious the grid was, of how many

are could be down, shows the constraints, the clean floor of the stage ("No revolve or any of that unnecessary nonsense"), and also missing for myself the inflexibility of the theatre, I came away more than a little sad.

As so often in this country, great sums of money had been spent by people not truly fitted for the design tasks.

Just as I had earlier offended the then chairman of the Festival Trust by saying that his beloved portable scalprun on the main ground-floor promenade looked exactly like discarded outlets for the air-conditioning, I now upset some of the Playhouse men by my opinion that it was certainly the best Victorian theatre built in Australia for a hundred years.

I have not produced in the Playhouse, and am never likely to, but in the practical terms of pre-war-inch theatre I have no doubt it all works very well. The sadness to my mind is that no one had the courage to design a theatre that took account of the age we live in. I am not saying that, because the majority of the population is now habituated to the light show and subtle playing of the best television, live theatre should reproduce that. But being part of the action, taking

the involvement of the audience and the two show, approximating the few gradations of acting and communication that television achieves — these are all qualities of the drama that a modern theatre should note.

All manner of ways of changing the man-audience relationship can be managed these days: a number of seats can be made to revolve around a static audience, the audience can circle around a stage, can yowl and sit waiting as desired: there can be several concentric circles serving an audience which can revolve in different directions, and at different levels of need be — some looking down on stage, some looking up. Closed circuit TV, multi-channel sound in the theatre itself, all are possible.

The constraints and arrangements can be an endless game, but I am sure that somewhere amongst all these notions of mine or a possible "modern" theatre lies a device that will give new and major challenges to playwrights. When O'Neill tried, in *Strange Interlude*, to bring off a double level of communication he could only do it by continuous shifts, not easy to make work. Modern sound systems could do it with less shiftwork to spare.

This is a part of what I feel about the Playhouse, as well as subsequent theatre complexes such as Sydney's more recent Saymore Centre. They have no modernity, the audience of 1939 would have been perfectly comfortable in them.

Architect, George Molnar

FESTIVAL CENTRE



"The shapes are clear, sharply defined against the sky, white, joyful."

together by the central, horizontal lines of the plaza.

The shapes are clear, sharply defined against the sky, white, joyful. With the Plaza they form a cluster of gleaming concrete forms softened by the surrounding trees of the park. Texts are associated with celebrations, services, celebrations. They are good forms to suggest a sense of festivity.

From the white tents, long white lines of terraces descend towards the green lawns and the river. It's a happy landscape.

There is a place for criticism. Some details like the balustrade — and the apertures to the interior, too — are too heavy. People seem to be secondary to the walls. The intersections of concrete planes which form the tiers — often in forms which should have a raised edge quality — are made with curved balustrades. The concept of the simple shape loses its simplicity. The surfaces look put together.

The edges converge at two points. It was a frightening moment when I saw the south as heads of an immense baby carriage. I am trying to forget it.

The Plaza. The plaza is constructed of rectangular units. A tapering volume with cantilevered beams carries a platform. I hope the unit is self-supporting and does not rely for stability on connection with other units, though the shape suggests

otherwise. It would be nice to see some of them standing alone where shelter is needed, isolated notes of a tune.

They're slender, elegant and useful. They will give order and architectural unity to spaces to be created which functions related to the theatre will not fit in any more into the volume of the tent. (See remarks on kitchen below.)

Only two stairs lead down from the plaza to the garden. This makes the terraces isolated. I would have liked to see a closer relationship, of cascades of stairs overflowing the terraces everywhere, making the gardens an extension of the plaza. Maybe they will come. Terraces, stairs, paved areas, lawns, what a splendid world of festivity that would be. Forever. The balconies surround the auditorium from all sides. They follow the balconies on the upper levels. It is all one space, under the sloping roof of the main structure.

There is ample room to move around. There are views of the things beyond, of the plaza, of the park and lights, and of the audience silhouetted against them. A forested scale of few details. Strong, simple colours: red, white and black. It has a festival atmosphere of expectancy.

Yet it is an undivided space, rather restless. There again like the plaza the different levels of the programme are isolated, the only link between them is the main stair on the front. A series of stairs in the side foyer would have created a unified

This article is an architectural commentary on the Festival Theatre.

History. The Festival Centre will house the biennial Adelaide festivals. The site was chosen in 1964, work began in 1970, the Festival Theatre was opened in 1973. The architects were Hassell and Partners. Funds were provided mostly by the South Australian Government.

Design. One of the problems of designing a theatre is bringing the stagehouse into the general composition of the building. The facade usually encloses boxes. They are human spaces, of human scale and architectural expression.

The stagehouse is an clean shape, windowless, abstract, dominant. The classical solution used to be either to force it under the same roof as the theatre or to separate it in the same architectural terms and make it the facade.

At the Festival Theatre the stagehouse is clearly stated as a form of its own. So is the auditorium. The building is a composition of two volumes, brought

and dramatic place, a great stage setting for the audience to perform on during the intervals.

Auditorium. It's a multi-purpose hall, in fact in the Continental way about 2,000, in stalls, two balconies, and boxes. No one is further away from the stage than 100 feet. Visibility from every seat is good. The theatre is horseshoe shaped. A wide band of secondary rooms, entrance, stairs, shops, limousine parking the auditorium from the noise of the foyer.

It's a splendid room. Flanking the brown leather cloths of walls and ceiling, the illuminated spacings (boxes) descend on the mezzanine level of crimson velvet (seats). We are in a world where anything may happen. We feel adventure.

But do we Australians take our leisure too seriously? The architecture is brown, the hall beautiful and the details harmonious. Maybe it is my being conditioned to intervene where baroque glances hide, carry the load of the architectural design that I find the hall just a bit solemn. Oh, for a gesture of frivolity in our interior for spectators. But not here, please.

Stage and Orchestra. For the stage space from the proscenium opening — which can vary from 40 feet to 51 feet to suit all sorts of productions — is traditional. No mechanical tricks, all scenery is flown. But there is ample rehearsal area surrounding the stage, and storage spaces make it amazingly versatile for repertory production. Technical consultant was Tom Brown, working in present on Sir Ray Gossard's Melbourne Cultural Centre.

The orchestra pit holds 90 players. Full orchestras for concerts can have 100 musicians and a choir of 300. The

orchestra shell, which transforms the stage from a theatre into a concert hall is flown and can be put in position in two hours. Time for the choir is erected in one day.

Acoustics. The hall has adjustable acoustics, to suit sound required. According to the acoustical consultant, Fryer, Goodale and Duncan, the concert hall configuration with the shell in place gives a reverberation time of two seconds for opera (small cast), an orchestra of 45; the time was 1.5. I am not very musical and need my better pronunciation judgement. All I can say is that the opera I've heard never sounded better. One of them, *The Marriage of Figaro*. I heard a number of times before by the same cast in different theatres and I thought their voices had improved greatly. Over to Mr. Corvill.

Bar and Restaurant. Robots to relax and watch the world around. Glass walls give views of the glimmering foyer and Adelaide asleep in the darkness. But those horizontal, suspended beams, supporting scenic light fittings, must be removed, removed fast, and forgotten.

Both rooms are up to their full capacity on important occasions, and I am sure the kitchen is about to burst at its seams. Another set of glass doors must be installed to stop my daughters from the bill freezing their already in bad tempers due to floating beams and executable food.

Art. There will be plenty of art at the Festival Theatre. Adorning the walls at present is a tapestry by John Coburn and paintings by Sidney Nolan and Fred Williams. Excellent as they are as works of art, they are all wrong here.

There has nothing to do with their artist merits. But in a building where the play of

forms is so forced, you just can't hang pictures for decoration. Even if they are of the sort of Sidney Nolan's "Smoker", made up of 204 panels of great clarity, to be viewed from a distance of two feet.

Pictures for the foyer should be in harmony with the architecture, in size, design, colour schemes. They should be part of the concept of space.

This happens once. The statue of Manly in the entrance foyer shows complete unity between architect and sculptor.

It started with a delightful architectural mistake. The first landing of the grand staircase is thrust unconsciously into the foyer to give more space below. Unfortunately this space had a headroom of six feet only, clearly dangerous in a world of growing youth. So for safety reasons the space had to be made uncomfortable. This was done by commencing the stairs that leads like a leap of faith air-conditioning, to fill the space. It does.

Summary. The Festival Theatre is an excellent building, the Festival Centre will be one of the most interesting townscapes of our times. The concept is simple, realistic and inspiring. With it Adelaide has established itself as truly the Festival City of Australia.

FOOTNOTES. Readers may wonder that nowhere in this article has my reference, allusion, comparison been made to the Sydney Opera House. It was a strain.

• This article first appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald and is published with the Herald's permission. George Molnar is Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of New South Wales and is a Herald columnist.



Just Ruth



A one-woman show for Ruth Cracknell is in preparation. Some of the sketches will be contributed by Ruth herself; others by noted Australian playwrights.

I first saw Ruth Cracknell in *Madame Coward* in Sydney. It was a public dress rehearsal in the middle of which this intense performer did a "double take" (as I recall it was a "triple take") on the two gentlemen — for whom her character was concerned with her — standing on either side of her. The comic expertise of this particular piece of "business" dazzled in the summer only a few performers such as Jolande Tait or Charlie Chaplin achieve. The last that I remember of this particular actress both associated with marked visual effect is significant, having just directed Ruth as Miss Candour in *The School for Scandal*. I can testify to her skill in delivering Sheridan's elaborate dialogue and drinking a cup of chocolate at the same time, so that the action underscores and helps to punctuate the spoken word. In her performance, Mrs Candour's passion for gossip rears its head; the music as she delivers such now scornful tirade like a full-throated ruckus. As she twigs around the stage — and is immediately held by her intensity — a word I used earlier about Ruth: that this commitment should be proven in her work on *Madame Rastouky* in *The Cherry Orchard* (now in rehearsal). Not unexpected, one was still not prepared for the depth of feeling and assurance that this performer can also offer.

Such a sensible teacher Ruth may seem portrayed, but this is the only introduction I was able to taking with Ruth after *Madame* in Sydney; we found we shared much common theatre interest — and admired the sort of theatrical approach or "philosophy" exemplified by the late Sir Tyrone Guthrie. I can assure that here was an Australian performer denied the unique and opportunity that the English theatre and television world offers — merely by virtue of its size. (Who can say that in England, Ruth would not have her own television series?)

From my point of view as the newly appointed director of the SATC, I needed something contemporary for our first season, something Australian, something to help balance a steady, classical programme. Together with another new play, a show written by Ruth, and for Ruth by Australian writers, seemed the sort of challenge a substantial company should stretch up sufficiently.

At I write, our mutual obsession is the one that is working through *The Cherry Orchard*. Soon, however, we shall be wrestling and toiling with a host of different characters (not so very different, perhaps), many the creation of Ruth's own fertile imagination, others conjured up by

other writers. David Williamson, Michael Coss, Peter Yeldham, Alex Bero, Ron Blair and John McKellar. What work we include: what we omit, what ideas we expand, what suggestions we put to music, will depend on the cooperation and frustration of a months' intense rehearsal — always in the shadow of the evening magic of Chalk Cove. That is useful I think to work on something new in the theatre while performing a theatrical masterpiece at night is satisfying to any professional, and can usefully sharpen one's awareness. There are four of Ruth's "sketches" will be holding forth and weaving their way through *Just Ruth*. The bulk of the program will be packed, the harassed and the bewildered find a space, and the Port reviews heartily deplored. (What else can you do when your director and designer are English?) As the piano will be Syd Graham to add invaluable contribution when required and the guts of the evening will be Australian — a man as incredible as that "triple take". With some of the critics in Adelaide positively clamouring for "relevance", and the audience anywhere over-responsive to the immediate, a production built around a solo performer can effectively focus on the contemporary scene. If some of our rehearsal is spent ruminating the local papers for themes and ideas, we are in good company. Chalk Cove did the same thing.

So ends my confession, but some of those who have offered contributions, Peter Yeldham, Michael Coss, David Williamson and Alex Bero have been about their individual participation. These thoughts are an indication of the evening, like Chequers's, "reality".

Michael Owen

The idea for *Fields of Difference* was easy enough to come by, and the actual authorship of the play presented no untoward or, equally, few problems.

I should say that *Fields of Difference* is the only of its 15 scripts since that I didn't put up for the *Jazz* Radio show. Colin George, when at Armadale, commissioned a seven-act play which turned out to be *Family Love*. The Jewish theme appealed to him (and to me), and what we discussed my writing a scene for Ruth Crankwell. It was fairly obvious that the idea of a Jewish character should be avoided.

Now, writing for a known performer makes selection of material in some ways simple. I didn't think of a traditional Jewish character, a "balshewitz", when I thought of Ruth's face. But another sort of Jewish woman was suggested, and *Fields* is that person.

I took the commission to write for *Jazz* Radio mostly because of the technical challenge inherent in it. First, and most obviously, the business of writing a monologue. As it happened, I didn't find special problems in this, although I sup-

pose I should be able to provide a theory about the problems of the dynamics of one-person stories. Can't, sorry. I had the same disappointment in writing *The Gilt*. I was myself set up for the challenge of writing a two-hander, then larger ideas in it. If the one person is right, the same happens at the entire Seventh Canals: has nothing to offer, all their flux and drama must help.

I've already mentioned one advantage of writing for a known performer, another, in the case of Ruth. It was the advantage of knowing that the performer who is the subject of the content is very good. I must say that creates warmth but doesn't change my approach to the job. I always write in the expectation of getting a very good cast (which may be one reason why I have usually got one), a good director (plenty) in the simple belief that if you're a professional, then you have a right (though difficult) to expect a professional job to be done on and with your work.

Last point, I, personally, can't help a smacking, hunting, rather nasty feeling that when the work of more than one writer is up to be seen on the same stage, then an element of competition often the audience, for example "Whose did you like best?" (except in theatre where I need it and, sure as hell, I don't). That's one thought that's been with me, and a less constructive result of writing for *Jazz*

David Williamson

When I was asked to write for Ruth by Colin George, I immediately agreed, partly out of admiration for her great talent and partly out of gratitude for her superb and definitive performance as Irene in my play *What if You don't remember?* I asked Ruth for some guidelines for the piece and she suggested I do a loose-type character, which I thought would be easy, but five days later all I'd achieved was a pile of screw-up feedback and a significant deterioration in household harmony. The reason for my inability to write the piece was probably that Irene's character in the play had been defined by her conversations with the characters around her, and without those characters I couldn't sustain her. It was a salutary lesson in the difficulties of writing for a solo performer.

I finally created two new characters for Ruth, one communicating with an imagined second person, the other directly addressing an audience. But the experience was far more difficult than I'd imagined, and now Ruth tries the piece, I won't be at all sure whether I've been successful.

Peter Foldham

I first talked to Ruth Crankwell about writing for her in her crowded dressing-room at the Comedy Theatre in London a few years ago. She was appearing in *What if You don't remember?* and after the first night, when it seemed as if half the Australian theatrical population of London was crowded backstage to congratulate and encourage, we both agreed it would be "easy to work together some day". At the time I had a stage play touring England and on its way to the West End, but, despite this, I was thinking seriously of coming back to Australia to live. When I finally did return home last year, Ruth and Colin George, the artistic director of the South Australian Theatre Company, told me they were planning a seven-woman show, and asked me to do a piece for it. There was no particular theme at that stage. "Just write something that appeals to you," they said. Trouble was, that although I had written four stage-plays and quite than a dozen screenplays, I had never done a "sketch".

However, I had a theme. You see, I've always had the thing about computers. And before I knew both I suspect that for years, we have all been systematically overcharged on those computerised little machines that come through our letterboxes every month. We merely pay on the instalment plan that it all looks as

two weeks, and then a machine could be possibly be wrong. Australian computers are bad enough, but for several years I have had a running battle with a German computer. This infernal machine is owned and operated by the German tax office (March directed), and every month it sends me a statement for tax claims I owe on German play royalties. It is impossible for me to write and explain that this was paid by my German agent. I've tried that and the feeblest messenger simply sends off another demand on the first of the following month. I tried to wangle a copy, by writing a letter saying "Dear Computer", but this was disdainfully ignored. However, I feel we may be achieving some sort of grudging relationship. For in January, when I received my regular reminder alongside the amount which the computer claims I owe, were printed the words "Happy New Year".

So when Ruth and Colin asked me to write for her forthcoming show, what emerged was a sketch called *Dear Computer* — *Dear Mrs. Lornagreen*. Mrs. Lornagreen is a rather harassed and pompous lady who has received an enormous bill from the gas board's computer. Apart from that, she has had trouble with her husband, and the postman, and her mother-in-law. Mrs. Lornagreen is a character I'd like to develop further some time. Perhaps in a full-length play. But only if Ruth is available to play it. Because, to me, she has that rare quality, when she writes on to a stage, of arousing in the audience a feeling of comic expectation. I think she is one of the true originals of the Australian theatre.

Mrs. Ruth

After trying to write a fairly decent contemporary review article and being of it, I ended up writing a playlet that had been hovering in my mind for some time. It's not something that only Ruth Crankwell could perform (though she seems best equipped to do it). The first result is surreal rather than the black-out technique pioneered by Philip Simon and Maria Bramson. It was fantasy and shock to explore a state of mind, rather than proceed along the general from A to Z. It's also a bit bizarre.

Controversial topics can be polemic and sometimes inspire well-crafted verse, but when they shake out something that was having around looking for an outlet, they can be great.

The only problem with surrealism in Australia is that it is uncontrolled only by the well-educated and the uneducated. Australia's debate is largely conducted by the half-educated and remains at the 1986 level, when parents were supposed to put a toe that looked like a tree and Cubans were multiple references to be pined and killed. Imagine the assumption if an Australian had written *Waiting for Goshaw* in 1952. Yet, in my modest opinion, the absurdism was an influence on Australian writing in the 1960s and the ideas and techniques of surrealism continue to nourish both the mainstream and politically/experimental strands of Australian drama now.

DEADLY ACCURATE — that's Cracknell

"This is a formidable and remarkable lady, fascinating to talk to . . ."

Miss Ruth Cracknell, whose title as first lady of the Australian stage could be challenged only by Eileen Herledge or Betty Mackintosh, was surrounded by tall names in her early life — if I recollect rightly. From these aunts, whom she feels may not have been so tight and fierce as once she thought them, actress Ruth Cracknell has drawn magnificent references over the years.

It was perhaps two years back that I lunched with Miss Cracknell in Sydney, not long after a brilliantly heavy intimate revue season at Neil Orr's Loft in Manly. She was about to go into something much more velvety and serious at the Old Tote Theatre in Sydney, we mainly talked about them where she drew her famous comic humor, those turning sisters with eyelids and glaring eyes, as the big housewife who — after using a swift machine technique on her husband — would fade and dissolve as the flesh into a soft and passionate Victorian fantasy. The sons and their acquaintances had some relationship to these deadly and accurate styles of women.

She will interview Cracknell. She will not, simply will not, talk about directors, or fellow-players except off the record — and the Ruth Cracknell way of asking for dialogue to be all the record is polite, but very eyeball-to-eyeball with a flicker of the rail-trip mouth and as well by her is even, and the subtle of the chatter very close to one ear.

In other words, this is a truly formidable and remarkable lady, fascinating to talk to since her own advice and charming personality runs quite counterintuitively along with the skilled and quipping actress that she is.

There are no tricks, no turning of a profile, no random expectation of recognition by the audience. What there is in the true player's knowing of a good picture or expression — instantly taken up, reproduced unconsciously, perhaps passed on shadow once or twice, then sent to the living subject, down with the warts.

The Cracknell role-call is too long to print, Miss Cracknell has played everything from Ascheptha to David Williamson. Mostly she has been one of the swelling players of the cast, when she has (as happens even to an Olivier) not taken the eye, it has in my experience always been a disastrous fault.

Too well-mannered and schooled to remark, as Ralph Evans reportedly did to a young producer, "Young man, you are there to tell us the time and to bring cups of tea," Cracknell has suffered in silence

Modeling an earlier statement, there are two directors about whom she will speak, Tyrone Guthrie and Colin George. She first worked with Guthrie when the late grand genius produced *Orpheus Rex* with the Old Tote Theatre. He was the only director who made her feel part of a cherished estate. "If he had finished with me for the day, he would come and say, in that lovely gentle way he had, like a high priest of theatre, that he didn't need me. Some of our younger men would just keep on hanging about the studio for hours and hours, a sort of power narcosis."

In Adelaide for a two-play season, with a new woman show to follow, Cracknell is in a most pleasant and relaxed mood. The human scale of Adelaide helps this, of course, but she is also facing once again some real challenge in her theatrical life, different from the Guthrie contact but perhaps more stimulating, since it is over a longer stretch of time.

The Colin George way with his company, as I learned from quite a telling, Cracknell describes, is unusual and interesting — when placed amongst the usual Australian theatre experience.

"We have the emergency meeting, notes, movements, situations related — generally in a pretty subtle way — to the play we're rehearsing," she said. "Colin leads it all, participates entirely. We're a bunch of professionals really working out."

"It is my turn for the central effort of the meeting. I probably have to shut my eyes, maybe imagine that I am in a hostile environment, and have to make my way — still blind — towards some centre of friendship. Perhaps I will fly to the moon and try to experience that landscape. Anything at all."

Colin changes the various scenes about, and our audience. We might spend time throwing a ball just on one syllable. When I'm in class, I suddenly realize the cleverness of the man. He is putting me into situations that may have a certain relevance to *The School for Scandal*, but there is also a turn that is Chokbro. While I am thinking in terms of Shandee he has me also stretching towards *The Cherry Orchard*.

My comment was that such stretching sessions of training were pretty much what the local stage has suffered the lack of, too many players feeling that further learning and creative classics were irrelevant to actual of their standing.

This is where Ruth Cracknell believes that a special light shines from Colin George. "You can sense the way all the experience is making you run better. And

then there's this thinking of stepping into a company such as the SATC that has been solving its problems for years now. They are all together, I found that beginning to work with them was a challenge as big as any I've had."

"More thanks again to the Colin George training sessions. The best able to get to terms with the rest of the company very quickly and smoothly. I have nothing quite like being all suffering in sadness together."

On my previous meeting with Miss Cracknell, she stated a notion that very few parts for women in the middle age range were being written by Australian playwrights. Agreeing that this was one of the richest ages of women to write about, I suggested that she should commission a playwright or solo write a play suitable for her. Her response: "I'm always for two-step over to talk to writers — for alone after the money to do a play for me."

In Adelaide, I wondered if in fact Cracknell had done anything about the notion. "I'm still no-thing, but hardly enough, since I've been working here, Colin had the idea of writing a one-woman show about me, covering, probably, various types of women. He's got Ron Barr and Michael Coven both doing material for it, plus my own bits and pieces. So, in a way, something has been done."

The life of her family is an important part of the Cracknell assurance. With her husband, Miss Cracknell runs a portrait-framing and art print business in Sydney ("I'm looking around Adelaide with a business eye, there may be chances here") and she has three children to ponder. A photograph produced one lunch showed an eighteen-year-old daughter as beautiful and alive as Miss Cracknell was herself at that classically post-theatre age.

In Adelaide until 2 May after, there will be time for at least some family visiting. Her husband will be over more often, and sustained contact with her personal life is obviously a real pleasure.

In Adelaide, a city she is growing increasingly fond of — because of its scale, and the people — Cracknell is living in a motel converted from an older-style mansion. There is room for wide corridors, and sitting rooms, a garden to walk on. It is also an easy walk from the theatre and its rehearsal.

Here was a lady of the theatre very comfortably established in a strange city, working harder than for some time — these days the Cracknell reputation is such that she does nothing she does not positively want to do — touched with an early affliction for the style and pace of Adelaide.

"Would the stay in the elegant city?" It depends on the season," came the complete theatrical reply.



Peter Ward surveys the chequered history of the SATC — and detects a hopeful change of mood

The father of the South Australian Theatre Company is the invisible, large-gestured, administrative, creative and generous Colin Ballantyne, its chairman, now and, one trusts, for a long time to come.

Why should I open a piece on the history of the South Australian Theatre Company with such an ambiguous accolade?

It is because he is the father of the company in a quite positive, disinterested sense, and the fact that he had to be its progenitor rather than its first artistic director, or whatever, is part of the and history of early and mid 20th Century Australian theatre and needs to be told elsewhere.

Let it be enough to say that Colin Ballantyne is a non-pod — one could not, at his peak, call him "amateur" — producer-director of live theatre in South Australia, kept the flag of the art flying in that interregnum between the lap-dog of musical-hall and vaudeville, that died from the impact of the movies, and the beginning of tele-drama.

Thus means simply that the standards had to be maintained, and only dedicated people could do it in these years of gross commercialism.

Ballantyne's dominance of the situation, together with his wide standing in theatre, and blood, sweat and tears, kept it all together, taught two generations of actors, and influenced a young lawyer who was later to be Premier of South Australia, Don Dunstan.

But more than that. He reflected in a fundamental way answers to the Premier, the designer-advisor to the Playhouse Theatre, Tom Brown, actors, who in the SATC, have always taken a central role, the Teddy Hodgson and Leslie Dwyer, and indeed a whole climate of openness and feeling that has led to the kind of cultural phenomenon Adelaide is today.

Ballantyne, in turn was himself influenced by his wife Gweneth, who has always taken a back seat, but whose judg-

ment was critically essential to some, if not most, of his key decisions. As a teacher-producer of children's theatre in her own right, and as an actress, she educated a complete generation of college theatre-goers.

And the two of them, by teaching, example, and general sense of the theoretical limits of things, assisted in creating a mood that, from about 1948 on, culminated in a kind of "recovered belief" that Adelaide in particular and Australian theatre in general would never properly reach the outer limits of the theatre arts until there was some kind of subsidy public or private, and until there were proper theatres in which to play public or private.

The young politician Dunstan developed many of his commitments from the early formative films, and not only the political but also the cultural notions that were then current. He knew the Ballantynes well. He had himself dabbled in acting for radio, and as a much-paired Actor, Equity, a union to which he still proudly belongs, a being convinced for a Labor Premier was only to belong in a union, but also to see that neither necessarily requires him to work on the shop-floor nor in the halls of striking or, as a word, the drag of the curtain.

And so (all this being a matter of setting the scene), enter the Elizabeth Theatre Trust and the old and not-so-old laughter of Adelaide.

Notwithstanding the dominant position that Ballantyne had created for himself in forwarding the effective theatre life of the State, the movement towards a State-subsidised theatre company occurred outside his personal orbit, though in the occupied climate he had helped to create.

The first South Australian Theatre Company was established in 1965 by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust as part of its regional drama company policy.

And in the manner of the trust at the time, a board of management was formed with members representing the trust, the Adelaide City Council, the State Education Department and the ABC. It was, with one or two exceptions, a comfortable little affair. Everyone knew nearly everyone else, several knew something about theatre, and all firmly believed that they knew better what the community, or art, wanted.

Then John Tasker, the company's first resident producer, was pressed from the start. Church words perhaps, but I was there at the time, and saw it happen. The scenario that John Tasker found himself in, rather in the same way as the role that Colin Ballantyne played as a producer in Adelaide is essential to an understanding of what the SATC is today.

John Tasker had arrived on the job by way of being Patrick White's favourite producer-director, in the hairy, hairy early years. It was not a recommendation. Many of the members of Tasker's board were closely associated with the board of the Adelaide Festival of Arts, which in those days was making a habit of finding White's plays morally suspect. (The same board rejected Alan Seymour's *One Day Of The Year* on the ground that it was potentially subversive because it depicted Anzac Day in an unfavourable light.) So a somewhat flamboyant young producer with a Gipsian tongue and, for the board, an unusual life-style, was held at arms length and eventually administered out of the way.

For Tasker, the two-and-a-half-year struggle was a scarring thing, but the achievement was, for the time, considerable, one of the high points of which was a superb production of Peter Shaffer's *Room At The Top* for the fourth Adelaide Festival of Arts in Adelaide University's rock-piling Great Hall. It was a swirling spectacle marked only by

The School for Scandal Ruth Cracknell as Miss Candour.



the handful of staff, their work, and one or three theatrical moments that in memory linger to be savoured.

Tucker's reputation included Durrant, Allen, Alan Hoggood, Shalinsgrove (for schools), Dobson, Hochbush, and Packer: his preferred second line a small nucleus of players, none of whom still remain members of the company.

Though frustrated by the meddling of his board, the shortage of funds (in 1968 the ETT's guarantee was \$16,000), and a succession of mediocre theatres and rehearsal-rooms, Tucker's achievement was remarkable, to the extent that when he was finally administered out of the company, one of the most respected observers was the Premier, Don Dunstan, that in the first flash of office, shortly to be deflated in the polls but to return in government in 1970.

It was as a direct result of the reaction John Tucker found himself in that not only did Don Dunstan make the establishment of the SATC as a statutory body part of his election platform in 1968 and 1970, but also that when finally the government gave the company its parliamentary charter in 1973, the position of artistic director — his autonomy in production matters, and his general pre-eminence — was quite specifically entrenched and underscored by contract. The consequences of that decision are still being worked out, for good or for ill.

Leslie Heyman, now a senior actor with the company, took over as the company's resident producer in 1968 and continued in

that challenging position for two years. Heyman's directorial talent more matter of factly ran the company than Tucker's. He was less discussed, and even his role really in building something new and possibly fragile together. He did so, aided to some extent by the advice of the Australian Council for the Arts, whose subsidy together with that of the trust, allowed for the appointment of a resident designer and contracted players. The Adelaide City Council also helped in providing rehearsal rooms above the city vegetable market gates, a symbolic gesture, some thought, for a company that had the choice of either vegetating or growing.

A Day in the Death of Joe Egg, Leon, The Shadowbox/The Real Imperious Hound, Run the King and The Cannibals, together with a shortened version of *Pygmalion* for schools in the city and country areas, were produced during this period, keeping the company's presence in the city alive.

Finally, as its contribution to the sixth Adelaide Festival of Arts, English actor-producer Peter Collingwood was invited to produce *The Struggle* with the company's nucleus augmented by guest actors from other regional Australian theatre companies. It was generally regarded as a successful production.

By 1970 changes to the company's board, a general municipal change-of-heart, and the prospect of a change in State Government, all conspired to create a generally more relaxed atmosphere. Leslie Heyman slipped down from his position and Peter Batey was ap-

pointed artistic director.

Swelling subsidies and a generally rising box office, gave the company a sense of self-confidence, and in the first year Batey produced eight major plays, including *The Quare and the Rebels*, *Measurements and Confessions are Dead*, and *The Inverse Builder*. An outside workshop was established and seminars were made to the company's administrative and technical staff.

The year 1971 saw even more activity, a total of 16 productions, with the company touring to the Festival of Perth, Canberra, South Australian country areas, and performing in informal city venues. And the level of manpower continued in the first half of 1972. *The Alcibiades* was produced for the seventh Adelaide Festival of Arts, and other productions in the repertoire included *An Arabesque Night's Dream*, *The Pluckers of the Western World* and *Shady There* was also another Canberra tour and two school seasons.

But radical changes were occurring in the city, as State Government lost, and in Federal politics, that resulted in the company receiving subsidies worth \$140,000 that financial year. Further, the South Australian Government was by then committed to the construction of a drama theatre seating about 850 people for its Festival Centre, together with the passing of a legislative charter for the company. These were moves and documents that meant, in effect, the overnight transformation of a small regional theatre company into a government cultural institution, with all the good or the bad that could mean.

It was a change in role and ownership that aroused surprisingly little opposition, except from Dr Jean Baxterby of the Adelaide Council, who at the time argued that the status of a "statutory" theatre company was perhaps placing government and theatre a little too close together for either's benefit. She was a voice crying in the wilderness, for the Council as pagans sat rolled on.

But Jean Baxterby's words were louder in one important respect. Against the proposal that, in addition to the contracted workers in the company being able to elect one of their members to the board, the artistic director should also sit on the board, she vigorously argued that such a move was not only outlandish but unworkable: administrative lunacy. How, for instance, could the board determine his or her salary, or future, or performance, or whatever?

A parliamentary select committee which investigated and reworked the original Bill took note of this argument, so that the somewhat anomalous result was achieved of a six-person board, three nominated by the government, two elected by the subscribers of the company and one by the contracted players and staff, none of whom were selected by the artistic director. But he did not have a way in short an arbiterance occurred in which an actor could be better informed of board policy than the artistic



Colin Ballantine

While those moves were under way, there was a caretaker board running the company and this called for applications for the position of artistic director. Peter Barry being asked to apply. It was at the time assumed that the caretaker board acted a little leniently with Barry, who was, indeed, not pleased at the somewhat abrupt ending of what had been two seasons of hard work and vigorous promotion. The caretaker board argued that, with the new company structure, and the government's planning responsibility, the senior position should be thrown open once again. Fair handling or not, the position was advertised, and George Ogilvie, then with the Melbourne Theatre Company, got the job.

Ogilvie brought to the South Australian Theatre Company all the qualities that had made him a star producer in Melbourne. Dedication, a romantic commitment to style, passion and the large picture, and a total conviction that as the master of form, a theatre company of stability and impact, the most important ingredient was an almost personal, individuality/individual working relationship with each company member.

It was the basis upon which he had worked in Melbourne, with one major difference: in Melbourne the day-to-day and month-by-month managerial decisions of the MTC were made by John Sumner, whereas in Adelaide Ogilvie had to make them. It was no longer a matter of "Here's your production, play, cost, design, season, and programme — go to it". The complex managerial problems associated with running a major (in Australian terms) theatre company — the necessity to plan ahead to make firm decisions, to work out schemes and plot courses of action, to relate to office-routine, financial planning, and all the machine parts of theatre management — were a struggle to him. And as a result conflict began to occur between the administration of the company and the artistic director. Ogilvie tended then to withdraw, heading in alongside his friends and confidants, Rodney Fisher and Helmut Bakula. And, as a collective unit, the company began to experience strains that sometimes came close to breaking, to the ironic frustration of all: board management, artistic directorate, players, and technical department.

And yet despite this situation, and the inevitable loss of efficiency, George Ogilvie pulled out from the materials to hand — these he inherited and these he acquired — a company that presented in an often surprised, occasionally surprised audience, productions of great style and panache, of dramatic insight and vigour.

But it was not — except in some adequate productions by Rodney Fisher — an intellectually needed-out, or flamboyant approach to theatre arts. That was not Ogilvie's style. His intuitive and sometimes overworked approach to the play in hand often resulted in an enormous

effect both on his and his cast's part were required to bring the production to some of the notable.

Many productions appeared to be the result of a kind of straining of resources, and when the inevitable occasional harsh criticism was made the reason was at times an almost embarrassing capacity for members of the company, especially of the artistic directorate, to become highly defensive and seriously argumentative. All of which were signs of the tensions underlying the surface show.

But there was a honeymoon period in all this. Ogilvie was hired as director in November 1972 and between then and the company's move into the Playhouse of the Adelaide Festival complex, a settled in an old suburban church and performed in a variety of theatres with varying success. Plays during this period included David Williamson's *Jugglers Three*, Long Day's Journey into Night, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *A Cowardly Marriage*, *Disgraceful*, *Alpha Beta*, *More Abraham* and *The Comedy of Errors*.

For the 1974 Festival of Arts there were two productions, Louis Essau's *The Ashes of Gogol Place* and a re-run of *The Comedy of Errors* as well as a two-night show and live-action performance. With Helmut Bakula as director of young artists, the company began its Theatre-in-Round programme and began touring schools. At times honestly, at others with a vulgar clipping on brasserie, it began properly to be imagined as a cultural force in its own right, not merely there, but with absolute talent and creative potential.

And it was now big business, as theatre companies in Australasia.

In October 1974, the company moved into the multi-million-dollar Playhouse where every dream of a struggling producer in the form and effort was realised in technical facilities and community support. The total funding picture told the story. The annual subsidy, contained State Government and Australia Council, went from \$140,000 for the 1972-3 financial year to \$260,000 in 1973-4, to \$480,000 in 1974-5, to \$490,000 in 1975-6. Current projections for 1976-7 indicate a total income, combined box-office and subsidy, of something in the order of \$750,000.

The opening season in the Playhouse in late 1974 saw three "show" productions, *The Three Caskets*, *The Department*, and *She Struggles to Compare*.

In 1975, the company's first full year in the new theatre, brought in such plays as *As For Julia A*, *Spencer*, *Ghetto*, *Black Sparrow*, and *When Forgiving Ten* plays were produced in all, and the company toured throughout South Australia and played in Melbourne and Sydney.

For the 1976 Festival, there were again two plays, *Compulsion* and *Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire*, and following them, *A Handful of Friends*, *Gabrielle*, *Engaged*, and *Major Barbara* were outstanding productions.

It was an intensely-fought, one, sometimes achieving moments of real interest, sometimes levels downgrading, polemical, but overall a standard of achievement which some people might regard as the highest than in Australia. We are not able to judge the inevitable fact here always expressed their judgments.

However, what should be said is that from the Adelaide Theatre-makers' point of view, the most disappointment, during the years of Ogilvie's direction were the continuing inability of the company to come to grips with its relation to the political and social environment in which it operated. It remained as it had under the successive directorships of Tindler, Dwyer, and Barry, a kind of cultural appendage of Adelaide, a luxury thing that was a bit strange in its attitudes and style, an expensive court in a theatrical Adelaide, a middle-class thing, a thing existing and supporting its own identity and cultural towers of illusion.

Hands words, perhaps, and they can be directed at most theatre companies in Australia. For every-one theatre and high-culture performances always run the risk of self-love and social overblowing, a risk that other major widespread cultural institutions such as art galleries, libraries, and even botanical gardens, have learned of an increasingly aware.

Such comments were not unknown to George Ogilvie or his company, but despite a struggle to break through, and in a real sense, cut into the community, they remained fixed in it to stretch the metaphor under water spots. Now with standing solid efforts to make the company cut on to the norms of the country or into schools or workshops its impact was negligible. And despite occasional successes, most members of the company, including the directorate, knew this and deployed their knowledge by elaborate defenses and a quickness to anger. They had not yet succeeded.

And so with this before it, and several seasons growing, the directorate looks up, Helmut Bakula resigned to study overseas. Rodney Fisher resigned to take up freelance work. George Ogilvie's contract, which had been extended a year in 1976, was not renewed. He stayed in to play in a Christmas show, and then stepped down to travel for a time. And the company entered a new phase in its development, with current English producer-director, Colin George, an artistic director, its director of theatre an education in Roger Chapman, panel director in David Williamson, assistant to the director are Ron Blair and Bruce Bennett, and the head of design in Rodney Ford. It is an impressive team, but it is too early to predict that they will escape the fate of self-indulgence and overblowing.

But let it be enough to say that the advent of Colin George in late 1976 has changed the company and the mood of things generally, so much that whatever happens, things will never be the same again.

OUT



George Ogilvie

Kevin Kemp interviews George Ogilvie, retiring director of the SATC, and his successor, Colin George

The George Ogilvie retiring from his job as artistic director of the South Australian Theatre Company was the most relaxed Ogilvie I had met. Directing his closing production, playing a role in an Old King Cole show for the school holiday season, another scene closed in on Mr Ogilvie at all.

Postponed had been lifted from him like a cloak, and he seemed cleaner and cleaner than before. Always amiable, always with an opinion, clearly possessed of an intense, ongoing love of theatre and its practitioners, George Ogilvie can confirm the axiom, most unobtrusive entrance to an event that I can recall amongst stage people we know. Without his being at the least unhelpful, I have seen Ogilvie at a large gathering of critics, simply some regret at having to disturb such eminent folk.

Other artists, directors have their entrances and their exits quite beautifully choreographed, they move and wait their advantage in an eternal state of almost-on-going.

With Ogilvie it is different, only in conversation will he develop vibrations towards you — and then only if the conversation is working well.

Some time ago, when *Agamemnon* was beginning its resurrection fight around the leading Australian companies, I was at a critics luncheon and was sitting under attack for my review of the play in an Old Toke production. I dismissed it all as trivial intellectual nonsense, not at all the sort of piece to be picked up by theatres which proclaimed serious aims. A warning however, pushed at Ogilvie. "Of course you'll be doing it in Adelaide, won't you?" Ogilvie. "Not at all. I don't think it is the sort of play we should be doing."

From memory, Anthony Steele and I cheered. I added the point that a newspaper editor I knew played for the second half of the play in Sydney only because he'd heard that the actress playing the girl had a great part of it. Certainly, it was the academic sort of remark one expects from critics, but it was as a good comment on the play as I had come across. At least, it amazed Ogilvie and confirmed his view.

Subsequently, Ogilvie and his company did the play, and when I thought the up of this latest luncheon, it opened many George Ogilvie opinions. We had been discussing the influence imposed by the

physical presence, and traditions, of theatre on things themselves.

"I would never have done *Agamemnon* in an old house, but it was right for this play", "This place" being the Playhouse of the Adelaide Festival Centre. "Everything here is so splendid, you're surrounded by all the desirable things — but after a time it becomes very clear that this luxury has its own needs. And they were different from our earlier life."

"With the Playhouse, I was very much aware that a lot of people were coming to the new theatre with expectations not at all like the audience we had had at our regular earlier venues. Suddenly, it was all right and proper that *Agamemnon* should be done — in this place and for this audience."

The Ogilvie policy, through "looking" to a hard word to use with George Ogilvie — his package of ideas for theatre and its workers would be a better term — was to perfect a group of players and an imagination that would patch consciousness of live theatre into the surrounding community.

Resented for his prolixity because of his respect for his co-workers, Ogilvie shared his last share of marshes for the South Australian Theatre Company. If he has a regret, it comes from the way the group had to become isolated and isolated its handsome new premises from home.

"In our old premises," Ogilvie says, "every thing happened somewhere else. All our work was out, we would play in various venues, in many, mainly private. The workshops were well, we had a really very big and busy school and community venture in our Theatre-On-Road. We had a centre, but people were mainly going out from there, there was a bubble of activity all outside the building."

"Here, we've always had the Playhouse (seemingly) over us, in a matter of months it became the big thing. We noticed that the things that used to happen outside our building in the earlier days became a little less important in the thinking and priorities of the company."

"The atmosphere, the Playhouse — that dominated. What were we doing there became for the most important day-to-day questions. And as we were saying, different audiences back up — with different expectations as to the sort of plays they would see."

Say, it has all been a new time for us. I think it would all have shaken out quite well if I had continued here. Companies are like that: if you've done your training well then any amount of over-attention to a luxury theatre will settle down and the real work will go ahead again."

It was 1977 when George Ogilvie took over as artistic director of the SATC, and after nearly five years his age is for a time of rest, some months or a year to let his late sides again. One of Ogilvie's fortunate qualities is his professionalism, he can step from working with company or amateur stages into the commercial theatre.

On some occasions with his own

own," but in careers of life which he became closely involved. Ophiusa did, in my judgement, have a tilt not kindly towards his players, not driving them to a schedule tight enough to ensure that opening acts would use all their explanations brought together. Yet in a major professional engagement everything was just what time and acuity right on the night.

With complete amenability, Ophiusa recollected that I had said in a review of so that "Mr Ophiusa's productions are always made better in the second week" — which statement one supposes, in some sort of a compliment, and critical more of a system that does not always allow "first night production time."

Last year Ophiusa produced Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* for the Australian Opera. I suggested that it must have been the most daunting job he'd faced.

"I was petrified," Ophiusa took a little time to call together exactly the quality of the fear and its overcoming that the opera had given him. "Then they were, the great company, so completely professional, men on every hand, very formidable whenever one looked."

"One thing I know — I had to measure up somehow on the musical side, luckily, I was trained as a musician and when I managed to establish some musical credentials it all settled up."

"Then I treated them exactly as I would a company of actors, we sat down and discussed the opera, its plot, Mozart's thinking, his time and style. To my relief, everything went perfectly, in the end I think it gave me as much pleasure as anything I've ever done."

It must have given the Australian Opera some solid satisfaction as well, Ophiusa is invited back to produce another opera in the 1977 season. High professionalism of this more spectacular one may not play the main role in the hands of George Ophiusa, it is easy to write that his large decisions are not discussed. Withdrawal (as a last hope) will show him, as he knows and owns, what right and particular way he will go.

Early in his career Ophiusa spent six or seven years in Europe, training in music, studying movement, acting in famous minor groups, teaching, conducting workshops for the Royal Shakespeare Company. His teaching side is a strong element in his perspective, one way or another, his directing has always had a light touch on the actor.

Perhaps Ophiusa will be drawn back into a tougher theatre activity than the thick line carpet of Adelaide's Playhouse and the wide brightness of the Festival Centre.

A camped man, he is calm in style and a pleasant manner of whom against it, though, the talk is difficult, Ophiusa puts a fine garden rake over a small a word is found. He has none of the aggression that often accompanies that other compact man of the theatre, Mr Noel Frisvold, yet the Ophiusa must very much together.

What he leaves behind in Adelaide is a well-founded and confident company, a



Colin George

city has paralleled than when he entered, many points in the way theatre can represent as its whole existence.

The road is South Australia now at one of the blossoming of many flowers, plans of the Department of Further Education are for scores of regional theatre centres and for help in small places. Although a dozen or more up in any transient a film, the George Ophiusa way to Adelaide has done much for this new approach to theatre in the popular places.

It is right for Mr Ophiusa to move on, when you have built a monument that is what you do.



Mr Colin George, the new artistic director of the South Australian Theatre Company, has come on stage as well as remarkable an of quality professionalism of the resident and highest type: spiritual ardor for theatre that seems, it seems, only from the European style.

Such professionals as this — and Mr George has been named as the SAETC by Mr Roger Chapman, another Englishman, as now-in-charge of theatre education in place hereafter pretty turned at this

century) — show that at last we can beat a different drum from the old cry that everything should be same-born.

Twenty years ago, giving up my talented observation, I argued for importing theatre talents in that enthusiasm I even suggested that spirits such as Michel Saint-Denis should be wooed, to give our beginnings of limited theatre some sense of what the art was all about. Apart from the very few graces of theatre, there were, I proposed, a number of younger British and American figures who seemed exactly what we needed.

Such talk was then utterly fashionable, we had to have the complete Australian job, even though the talents needed did not exist. Since then the picture has become better, but had we at that time brought in the men and women we needed from overseas, my belief is that our ranks of acceptable professional in all departments of theatre would be immeasurably more on progress.

Colin George is, then, a protagonist for a cause. He brings well for the role. Devoted to theatre for almost exactly the same stretch of time as his new company's returning director, George Ophiusa, Colin George is busy, very, restless — a boxer. As yet, he is not sure as to the handling of actors in Australia, he knows, however, as he goes.

There is some discussion of critics, I like my usual sticks on the stage, that will

newspaper proprietors — and editors — are convinced in their total personalities that the arts are of some significance in society, and that artists can no older or more irrelevant than footballers or cricketers or jockeys, than we will suffer the proper sympathy and criticism. "Oh well," says George, "we'll undoubtedly get to know them."

Biography shows a whole busy and purposeful life with the stage. Up at school in 1930-33 Colin George was founder of the Oxford and Cambridge Theatre which became the Elizabethan Theatre Company. Here he directed with John Robertson, John Barton, Peter Hall — campus friends who have played very close to him as campus friends in often do.

From this beginning: Three years of temporary acting, then into his matriculation, an associate director and finally as the artistic director of the famous regional theatre, Northampton Playhouse, Sheffield Playhouse, the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield. In 1975 he came to Armadale Australia as head of Drama Department, University of New England.

With all this over his shoulder, the point of view is about George is that he is an artist future times. His main acting direction is about reflections in past events are almost always only to show how a thing may be done, how an actor can be saved.

About his Armadale start, obviously shorter than the university, hoped a night or, he has a little regret. "I think they feel I would have a lot, but there was — I did a bit of workshopping up there and got my students alongside play-acting. Somehow, the other part of the theatre got into me again. The Adelaide job came up the night before was made in my direction. Finally, the university was very good and let me go early."

"Yes, I'm not really afraid of getting back into this sort of work again. In a selfish way Armadale saved me up for a while and just enormously lucky to come into a centre such as the Adelaide Festival, and where a company that has worked as well with George for so long."

"I'm looking all the time at actors all over the country. I want to get the best here, and perhaps one or two from Britain. Most of them will be able to have only short seasons, two or three plays, but they'll enrich the permanent company — and the company will challenge them."

Getting on with boards of management meant a bogus for Colin George. "Tyronne Guthrie said to me that the first job of an artistic director these days is to get on well with boards." The focused energy, the clear areas of direction, the responsible competence of Mr George reduces no board trouble.

A question on experience rebounded on me. I had to tell George where I thought the substandard theatres had been wrong in choice of plays. My thoughts no long-term attempt to show the main traditions of theatre, too many lightweight plays that

would not have been in the straight experimental theatre, not enough courage with the more experimental overseas plays policy in treatment of some baroque and promising local plays.

With most of the George agreed. He is beginning his own new season with two new plays — *The School for Scandal*, *The Cherry Orchard* (for both of which he has persuaded Miss Ruth Cracknell close from Sydney. With typical drive, he has also organised around him a one-man show, for which his old playwriting friends Michael Cove and Ron Blair will be writing material, as well as Miss Cracknell herself, a lady who knows how to script for herself very well).

Judging from his English history, George will pay a deal of attention to contemporary plays, as he has himself in Adelaide means quite a lot to him, he serves that lack of him he has the most sympathetic government attitude to performing arts in Australia. South Australian society may still be stiff with its background of too-born men and would be aristocratic, but the new mood makes it the most exciting artistic centre in the continent.

To bring all this program under control should not be difficult one for the SATC, given the Colin George experience in that much tougher English scene.

As to the wide community activities of the company, George has a happy position. "Running all the educational activities, I've got the enormous luck of having Roger Chapman. Do you know him?" (Yes, I had met Chapman.) "Well, in Europe, in theatre education, he is just what I need a private completely indicated the status of his Chapman." "It means I absolutely rely about that whole sector of the theatre's work here. It couldn't be a better arrangement."

George finds that, on the whole, funding of theatre here is more generous than in Britain. "You've got to work hard for your money there. You get good official

assistance, but your theatre has to sell a massive number of seats on its own merit. I'm sure we can do a better job."

In the theatre physically it is likely that Adelaide audiences in the Playhouse may not have equivalent and conventional seating than before. George, like those who would like to bring his actors more into audience contact. He has also proved already very co-operative about use of the main theatre by other arts, especially the extremely promising Australian Dance Theatre, now reborn as remarkably by English choreographer Jonathan Taylor (another British export). For George, the total arts scene is as important as the success of his own personal field.

To his company of actors, Colin George has already brought a new style of professionalism. Just as dancers take class every morning, so should actors, he thinks. We discussed what I felt to be a certain laziness amongst Australian stage players when it came to training. (At the Adelaide Festival, director Bill Redmond arranged special classes with visiting French teachers — then found them largely neglected by the company.)

This attitude is not that of George. "You're quite correct. The dancers, from Margot Fonteyn down, don't bat work every morning. With actors I like to do the same sort of thing — movement, voice, games in imagination, the lot. It's essential. After a few early surprises, some of our actors and actresses will at last begin to see what it is, and what it takes, to be a worthwhile craftsman of the theatre."

This year of 1977 looks to be the year for the South Australian Theatre Company. Given the fact the company through a revolution of attitude on into a superb permanent home Colin George comes in with a new energy, knowing the things that can be done because he has already done them three times over. All that energy, all that knowledge — I cannot see it being deflected or diverted.



Rachel Rosell, Kevin Milva, Brian Dehnen, Michael Fuller, Ron Blair and Colin George rehearsing *The School for Scandal* for the SATC.

RON BLAIR

worked as assistant director
on Colin George's first production for
the SATC, *The School for Scandal*.
Here he reports on the experience.

Australia's worst enemies are other Australians

A work that lasts two hundred years is tough, said W H Auden. He was referring to *The Waste Land*, but the judgment stands for Strindberg's masterpiece *The School for Scandal*, which first opened in May 1977 at Dryer Lane and went on to become the money-spinner of the age.

It is a shared play for Colin George or have chosen to open his first season as the artistic director of the South Australian Theatre Company. It is, in the first place, a masterpiece of wit and artifice with a broad appeal to audiences, regardless of age or education. Mr George has played the part of the rake Charles Surface on the English stage and has also directed the play once before when he was at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield, where he was the artistic director for 12 years.

My own respect and admiration for the play increased and deepened with the weeks, and yet, why is it that so many who pass themselves off as knowing something about the theatre affect an superior snoot whenever *The School for Scandal* is mentioned?

I have seen it only twice in 20 years of the on-going, this being the second time. On the previous occasion it was played in Adelaide by the (Minor) company in the early 1950s. It seems to be a play too often slighted in the breach than in the observance.

How suited it is to the City of Adelaide (and, certainly of gangs where rumour spreads about faster and more effectively than usual and where, if there is a ready audience to be entertained, there are also some critics who pass off their provincial whining for sophistication).

Colin George's "meeting" of one gentleman, who had used the work of an amateur group to beat the SATC about the ears even before the play had opened, was deadly and blunt. But Mr George is a Celt, and when slapped, will lay aside his customary wit and good manners to give as good as he gets. "Australians' worst enemies," he maintained, as he put down the phone, "are other Australians."

At the first rehearsal he talked about the play and its relevance — that word which has become the catchword of those who would outlaw high agents from the stage.

Strindberg's society, he said, gave us wrong notions to gossip while a lost America. If the language of the play seemed artificial to our ears, it was neverthless true to its time. Here the director read a passage from Boswell's journal of 1763, the coaching story, where Boswell established his social arrangements with Louisa.

"Now sir, I have but but favour to ask of you. Whenever you come to regard me play don't use me at all, nor trust me only but inform me, by letter or any other way when it is over."

"They mislead, don't talk of such a thing. Indeed we cannot answer for our allusions. But you may depend on my behaving with civility and politeness."

The play was blocked in five days, with the various call thrown in for good measure. "I've worked on a lot of shows," drawled the famous producer-manager, "but none was ever blocked in a week." This kind of immediate response to the demands of stage movement is a direct result of Colin George's years in the

English repertory system. However, it did not stop there. For the remaining five weeks he worked with the crack cast he had gathered from across the country, altering and shaping scenes after scene, day after day. Behind all the stage business was a thorough awareness of the need to root the action in the reality beneath the artifice. As a result, Brian James's Sir Peter Teague became more than just a comic old fishhead with a frizzy young wife. His portrayal of a generous old fellow tormented by first love was one of the production's highlights.

Another unusual aspect of the production was the concern to build those with more experience — far from novices in the Australian theatre, alas. I remember the delight when Ruth Cracknell gave us also developed her own exact comic business with the chocolate cups and the nigger spoon when she, as that notorious ambulance-chaser Mrs Caudwell, related the misfortunes of others with scholarly delight. It was a treat, too, to watch Ted Hodgman (a wonderful actor) develop his Christine.

The first preview audience came from the Coors-Cola factory. What hope had we to interest them in a tangled plot of duplicity and disguise told in intricate English? There were a few mistakes at the first interval, but by act two we had them. By opening night, the audience was swept along by the play and the playing. Even the Adelaide critics gave their lofty approval.

A work that lasts two hundred years is tough.

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WRITE TO US FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF DANCE BOOKS

DON DUNSTAN, SPEAKING OUT

"The South Australian Theatre Company so far hasn't reached the world standard for which I had hoped"

It was a matter of chance, a quickly arranged interview fitted in at the first available opportunity. But the most awkward (imaginably could not have it) aged once was more reflective of the Dunstan style.

He had that morning driven to Adelaide from Whyalla, an economically troubled South Australian industrial city, after an overnight visit that combined governing and politicking.

Immediately afterwards he was going to the ABC's Colonnaded studios for his latest poetry reading session. Marvel and A. D. Hope.

And, to complete the effect, we met in a restaurant in the heart of his electorate — between the city and the ABC — over a steak and a glass of wine for the interviewer and the attendant sides, of color for the interviewee.

It was relaxed, informal, a taped conversation by a man in command of his subject and with a professional consciousness of his central audience.

Such revelations as there were were less than startling. But some of the Premier's judgements — for instance his evident, rising of the work of State Opera compared with the South Australian Theatre Company — are bound to cause more than a ripple locally when published.

I began by asking Mr Dunstan, who as Minister responsible for the arts, will this financial year hand over grants worth \$1.5 million, what role he saw the arts having in South Australia.

"I think they have a role both in the community function of holding a mirror up to life and also in providing a tremendous enjoyment of life for a steadily widening group of people," he said.

"It's inevitable in modern times that drama tends to be a bit of an elitist thing."

"With colour television readily available, people need to make more effort to go to the theatre. But that's inevitable with all the performing arts."

"But I think that what is now happening in schools and community theatre generally shows a very considerable revival of interest in the theatre."

"I think it is significant that, at the time television was introduced, a lot of people thought radio would die. It hasn't, but the



theatre audience has become very much more aware than it was.

"In the same way, I think the performing arts are not going to die now. And the presence in South Australia of a theatre company of excellence will mean a great deal to community activity and to our general quality of life."

The Dunstan administration — continuously in power and active in the arts field since 1970 — has given considerable support and hand-outs to the arts.

As well as backing the Adelaide Festival of Arts, precursor of the Torrens-shank Festival Centre complex, big subsidies to drama, music and other groups, the government has established a special department for arts development.

I asked Mr Dunstan if he thought the community was getting a sufficient return on its investment.

Mr Dunstan: "I think it's getting a very good return. Already, without adequate development of our tourist infrastructure, we have the highest domestic surplus from tourism in Australia."

"There are two factors in that. One is the quality of life in Adelaide, with the input from the arts as a major part of it. The other is the wine industry. These two are major selling-points for us."

"The fact that people can enjoy the arts here to the extent now possible is one of the reasons why so many people come here."

Through the efforts of the State Government, the South Australian Theatre Company has been provided with a glamorous permanent home in the \$4.5 million Playhouse part of the Festival

Centre, a massive major subsidee and has been established by statute.

What did Mr Dunstan think of the company's performance and potential?

"His performance so far has been uneven and it hasn't reached the world standards for which I had hoped. I think it came from a professional beginning to a lower standard of professional excellence than was achieved by State Opera which was then a virtually amateur company to a rather lesser end in less time."

"But I believe it has enormous potential. It has some extremely good actors and it now has a director [British director Colin George] of world fame."

"There is every opportunity for the SATC to become a significant company in world terms."

One of the constant themes in the preceding discussion about Australian theatre generally is the relationship between the state-subsidised companies, commercial theatre and community theatre.

Was Mr Dunstan happy with the way community theatre was developing in South Australia?

"We've been endeavouring to help community theatre wherever we can. A great deal has been given in grants towards their operations. But they haven't always reached the standards we would like, either. It is not possible, by simple funding, to see that community theatre does reach an appropriate standard."

"There have been some disappointments in this area. But we want to do more."

"I am not satisfied that the expenditure we are making on the theatre is adequately reaching the citizens of Port Adelaide."

I mentioned that the Dunstan Government's latest major move in the arts area had been to buy Her Majesty's Theatre from J. C. Williamson's for \$600,000.

Why?

"In the first place we couldn't afford to lose that theatre disappear from the scene in South Australia. There are great many performances which require, essentially, an audience of the size that can be provided by Her Majesty's. The Festival Centre was built assuming the continuance of a 1200-seat theatre in Adelaide. Without one we would be faced with real problems about venues for a range of events."

"It was necessary for the Festival of Arts. But there were other reasons why we could not let it go."

Many actors feel that when it comes to film they are the last consideration. It is cameras, lights, sound, start the dolly, there's a dog barking, a plane going over, someone farted! The sun's out again, stand by talent, and finally, very finally, action. And they are not happy.

As a leading director who wants every actor to give their very best, it worries me that they are not often happy. Having mainly worked around the technical aspects of the film set, I wanted to find out about that place where the actor is generally the happiest, the change. More particularly, that barely experienced luxury on the Australian film set, the rehearsal period.

Gill Armstrong

"Now where were we up to, Sally?" (or how to be an actor's director)

Gill Armstrong is a film-maker. She was one of the first producers of the Australian Film and TV School. Her films include *The Royal Family Moving*, *Sandbar Nipal*, *Don Hundred is a Day*.

Grief and *Smoker and Lollie*. The latest, *The Yinger and the Doctor*, starring Ruth Cracknell, was made in a 1976 Greater Union deal and is now to be released commercially.



John Bell of the *Manned Thorpe* not only manages to make critics and audiences consistently happy, he has also been given the highest accolade of all, that of being sometimes described as an actor's director, the supreme happy maker of actors. He very kindly agreed to allow a young actress from the film world to probe the rehearsal period of his production of David Williamson's play, *A Handful of Friends*.

I took the script home with the thought that perhaps a kindly manner and Franco-Danish good looks might be the key to winning any actor's undying, constant happiness.

I read the play and wondered what we were all going to be bawling ourselves about for the next four weeks. On paper it didn't seem to have much going for it. It all revolved around some rather unconvincing characters doing some inconsequential bitching. Not terribly compelling stuff. A playwright called Jill wrote a lovely little about a film director called Mark, who casts his actress-wife, Sally, as his leading lady in his latest film. All because Mark's last film had sent up Jill's brother, Professor Russell McAlister and his wife, Wendy, who were meant to be overseas but were back in time to be here. One of the reviews of an intimate production said something like, "David Williamson needs a new handful of friends."



THE NEXT MORNING Peter Carroll, Judith Fisher, Peter Sarsar, Anna Volina and Berys Match assemble with their scripts marked respectively, Russell, Wendy, Mark, Sally and Jill. I heard somebody mutter that they were terrified to be working with the wonderful John Bell and talented Peter Carroll. I couldn't help noticing that our director had cast his actresses well as his leading lady. I wondered if this was wise. I thought every baby director's first-quest Golden Rule was keep away from angels, children and most of all relatives and loved ones.

THE PLAY OPENS ON A LATE AFTERNOON IN AUTUMN RUSSELL AND WENDY'S HOUSE AND JILL'S FLAT ARELIT BY LATE AFTERNOON SUN.

The rehearsal room at the Hammers Theatre in Kings Cross is lit by only morning sun.

RUSSELL STANDS IN THE LIVING-ROOM AREA UNPACKING BOOKS.

John Bell sits on the other side of the chalked circle that represents that living-room area and endeavours to represent the weary *Manned author*.

THE ROOM IS IN SOME DISARRAY AS WENDY AND RUSSELL HAVE ONLY RECENTLY ARRIVED BACK FROM OVERSEAS.

"How long have they been back?"

Somebody dares to ask. All at once they are all at it. They all seem to need to wait to know a lot.

Where's the housewife? What sort of books are they? How long have they been married? What sort of sexual relationship do they have? Does he satisfy her? Is there a step up here? What sort of things would they be unpacking?

Why does he just behave down if he is married? Would she dress up for dinner? How do you think they related as an intimacy? What sort of outside is it?

How old is our man? When was the last time they met? Did they ever sleep together? Does he still have a drinking problem? Do they own the house or are they renting? Was it a misadventure? How does the first about his man?

The room resounds with quizzing actors. They all still seem relatively happy, happy to be doing this play, happy to be working with such allies, but they keep looking into the gaps between the printed words and questioning. The first sign of unhappiness perhaps? They look to their director, their happy answer-maker, for reassurance. What's happening? He is saying he doesn't know, he is turning the questions back to them. Somebody throws a hissy-making answer. Suddenly they are all reviving answers. They begin to relate the characters to themselves and to



people they once knew ...

My mother always sticks the cupboard when we go away ... I have two friends who have drinking problems ... I've I've known film directors just like that ... You drive like an assassin I know, terribly delightful at parties, but you wouldn't want her as your best friend ... I know a professor who does funny voices and moves furniture around ... Why would someone offer their wife to their best friend? Do you know anybody who's done that? ... Does anybody know anyone who has affairs with men as well as women?

Everybody is enjoying themselves. The room begins to sound like a gossamer conversation group without the gross gross. One by one they slip intimately into their characters' slippers, ties, shirts, cowboy boots and work shoes. The would-be role turns into would-be's.

Obviously part of the barrier is broken down because we've shared that childhood thing ... I think it comes out of a sense of religious submission. A kind of Scrooge thing ... It's a common paradox, isn't it?

I don't think calling someone a clown is all that awful ... For it is I was always called a clown at school and it used to rile me ... You're a clown, Neil ... Does that I think he knows his films aren't very good, either ... Am I joking or serious now? ... Wouldn't I go and help? Would I give you a hand? ... I feel funny strong ... Then try standing ... Where?

There is a distressed pause. All look to the director for direction. Once again he guides them back into finding their own. "Try it again ... See how it feels ... Let it come naturally ... Just try to remember what you're trying to say in this scene."

They begin to try out various tones of their own. The prevailing atmosphere of happy concentrated involvement, I notice, is very productive. Our director sits like a cat on his side of the chalk line and gently guides each to contribute towards defining the underlying motivations and attitudes behind each scene and line. Given the moves and actions are related back to intent.

"How would you feel under all these shoes? I think that I'd just sit there. Don't worry about the exact moves yet. Shake a bit and see how you feel ... Take a moment to think of everything that occurs to you before you ask them in ..."

SALLY, MARK WHAT A SURPRISE!
JILL, I KNOW IT'S A CLICHE BUT YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED A BIT

"No don't sit there, that's the coffee trip ..."

And by happy and, the gaps are filled in and each character is placed in living, breathing, drinking, conspiring, hubbub, the somebody-we-all-know-somewhere reality.

Our director, slowly rebelling his Hamlet chin, reassures us that there is no rush to find all the answers yet, that we are all in-

olved in a grinding process and that some of the larger truths will only come later in their own time. Everybody looks happily forward to that time.



By the end of the second week, the play is beginning to take some sort of clumsy moving shape. Our director, I notice, now begins to start to mould that shape.

"Hold it. Remember the sense of what he is thinking ... Do you do the dishes at home? Do they make you feel good? What are you both doing in that little place? How do you feel? Who's dominating? ... Think to yourself every time you say a line, 'How does that grab you?' ... Try counting five between each line ... Use those silences ..."

Try following her around as you talk ... Let's remember the effect on the audience ... Let's lead them along and then shock them ... OK, let's try it again, keeping all those things in mind ..."



It is, well, three of my life as an observer. Scripts are down. Lines are not. Objectives





are still being refined and defined. *Movies* are still being invented, discarded and occasionally reinvented. Everybody is still looking happy and I'm beginning to find the play is actually becoming more engaging with each run.

I'M SHATTERED IS THAT WHY TEDDY (Gandy, grand of Peter Carroll's mother, invented that marriage) KENNEDY AVOIDED ME AT THAT FACULTY PARTY? YOU TOLD HIM I WAS A HISTORIAN?

WHAT DID HE SAY TO YOU, WENDY? YOU DIDN'T GET AROUND TO TELLING US. Who's this Teddy Kennedy? ... Gwynes. Oh Anna ... Oh, not THE TEDDY KENNEDY ... Really? Oh I just thought it was any ordinary Teddy Kennedy ... Now watch me say the line exactly the same. WHAT DID HE SAY TO YOU, WENDY? YOU DIDN'T GET AROUND TO TELLING US.

(He should have known, the Golden Rule, animals, children, retail men ...)

5

Now they've got a house, everybody begins to fantasize in thinking and embracing. Something that all film-makers with they

had the time to indulge in between closely.

No that's not a very clear invitation to me. Have I got time to make her a gin and tonic? Do you think we're drinking too much coffee? What else can we bring out? After-dinner mint, sleep? Can you give it a little vocal lift?

It's like speaking of the same time.

The action continues, is desperately awaiting. Peter Sumner has bought a pair of cowboy boots. Beryl has had her hair trimmed into a postmodern-like cut. Peter Carroll is being more and more hysterically inventive each day as RUSSELL becomes a former funny man. His head has so far been inside, underneath, around the side and standing upon the one chair as RUSSELL McALLISTER BRINGS YOU THIS WEEK'S EPISODE OF HISTORY WHERE WERE WE UP TO SALLY?

I know, what if I make her a vermouth-salt slushy? But this is a vermouthed ... We could both put our hands inside the chair.

Happiness in reaching climactic proportions as the key answers start magically to explode around us, just as her dress or poem and they would.

God, it's only self self all the way through isn't it? She can't see past external. It's a negative tolerance, not an all-embracing tolerance. She despises herself. She really can't see. Her's is her own life? It's her all the way through the

play. Her's is a moral deliriousness? Oh no, he's not crying ... We're not crying at all. We'll soon go out in the freezer and there'll be no chips left and he'll have to start paying us the barbecue chicken.

The runs of such scenes are now larger. One director is beginning to reveal that he had a vision after all. He began to release each scene to the other and to the play as a whole.

"It is a problem in the play that there are three quarrel scenes in a row. But we should try to make something out of it. We should try to reveal them as quarrel scenes set at least half way. We mustn't anticipate it ... You must keep the scenery level up.

There are two danger spots where it's dropping. Let's get a feeling of the old reality. You're both conceding to much that there is an answer. There should be a lot of space in this scene ... Keep it light ... Try hitting a real high as GO ON CARMELUP."

"No, I think my high is a bit later on YOUR GRANDFATHER WAS A SHIT" (Relative again.)

6

FIVE: SIX, SEVEN, EIGHT? Peter Carroll is dancing on one leg towards Anna, his hand waving in the air as he goes to the





blaring music. What's happening? This isn't in the script. Still they all look unprofessionally happy. Peter and Anna tango cheek-to-cheek across the fading disco marks.

I have blundered a bit late into week four and I can see everyone has been especially invested in my absence.

The final week of rehearsal. The frustration of being so near and yet so far. Memory threatens the flare time and time again. No one can hear the stage-manager's mumbled cues. He desperately tries to follow the dialogue as it leaps up and down the page. "Ah, Peter, that's awfully and seductively not seductively and seductively. David Williamson would be proud of this determination to get every word spoken at a moment.

Slap. Or over that last again. Now say it three times. Again. Try it again, Anna. Don't break it up. You must run the two lines together."

YOU MIGHT AS WELL GO ON
CARVE ME UP HERE RIGHT
ACROSS THE THROAT ... (Jagger)
YOU MIGHT AS WELL GO ON
CARVE ME UP HERE RIGHT
ACROSS THE THROAT (Jagger)

"Please look at lines tonight. I can't tell if it's working. It isn't too easy."

Anna goes home with her director to repeat three times across the dinner table. YOU MIGHT AS WELL GO ON CARVE ME UP HERE RIGHT ACROSS THE THROAT YOU MIGHT AS WELL GO ON CARVE ME UP HERE ...

Only practice makes perfect. Only perfect makes for real happiness. Our director pushes the wines that are pouring truckily superior. Routines are repeated unerringly. His "OK-one-more-time" persistence begins to work. Suddenly timing and pace are growing. Tension, passion and energy are building. And everyone is happy. "Yes, that's on the right level. It isn't quite done there. . . . Can you make sure all those cues come very fast so they haven't got time to protest?" That's good. Ann try to extend further each game. Hang on to that. Don't make it any harder or more better. Consider the way the two cue words. You must give it a more immediate quality. . . . OK, let's run

the dance routine one more time

7

FIVE, SIX, SEVEN, EIGHT! Peter and Anna, led by a robust choreographer are on the real stage, knocking their real knees together and doing real-looking leaps of the real furniture.

It is the first day on the set. Everyone bursts up and down on the real cushions, tests the real door handles and steps up and down the real steps. There is a lot of hammering, doorbell and phone effects, and bearded men in arid shirts are running a round with ladders and yellow coffee pots.

It is a run fraught with physical problems. Chairs to be stood on and moved about seem much larger and heavier, doors that really open and shut and steps that must be really stepped up get in the way. All the real vital elements of the just-learned timing are thrown. Cues are lost, people rushed and special routines impossible. Is the unfolding enthusiasm enough to crack? Our director patiently directs everyone back to basic aphorisms and do-it-agains, and the problems soon melt away and all is again happy and secure. Two chairs go and Peter Carroll stresses yet another way to be PROFESSOR RUSSELL McALLISTER BRINDING YOU THIS WEEK'S EPISODE OF HISTORY NOW WHERE WERE WE UP TO SALLY?

8

It is the first dress rehearsal. Everyone is looking very pretty in their new clothes, especially Sally.

Light, sound, coffee
SALLY? MARK? WHAT A SURPRISE

The addition of five Newral staff, a photographer, two minute Bell daughters on their summer holidays, and one row of

the public who have stumbled in by mistake expecting to see last week's production, Charlie.

"Now don't let's lose some of that key information. We've all got to be used to it that we have forgotten the audience hasn't heard any of it before. And pause after those laugh lines as you'll be drowned out. All in all, it went very well."

Anna hugs each daughter perched on either side of her on Russell McAllister's couch.

"John, John, they laughed!" Everyone beams. (Maybe relatives can sometimes work.) "Yes, it *was* funny." The director and his actress wife look very happy. Everyone looks happy.

9

The next night *A Handful of Friends* opens to a handful of everybody's friends, the public and the author.

I watch David Williamson's face as the crowd.

FIVE, SIX, SEVEN, EIGHT! He looks tightly shocked. Peter Carroll does a spectacular side-step. There is a burst of spontaneous applause. His girls Anna and Mary Louie with snoring passion behind the coffee table.

The author guffaws. He looks as if he is enjoying his play. I wonder if he is enjoying it more than when he last read it. I certainly was.

Four weeks of rehearsal, collaboration, deliberately happy rehearsal have managed to make the next into a living, fast, energetic, powerful and essentially entertaining production. Or perhaps I'm just not very good at reading plays and it was there all the time. I must go and see it again. I've heard that Peter Carroll has re-written yet another way of being PROFESSOR RUSSELL McALLISTER BRINDING YOU THIS WEEK'S EPISODE OF HISTORY NOW WHERE WERE WE UP TO SALLY?



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Graeme

Graeme Murphy, recently appointed artistic director of the Dance Company (NSW), who has taken the place of Jaap Flier, talks to William Shoubridge.



Murphy:

"All I can say is I'll try damn hard, watch my step and be prepared to heed warnings . . ."

Shankbridge: Grieco, could we start with some background details — personal history?

Murphy: I started as a Lavacadee with Ken Chikopis, director of the Tasmanian Ballet Company. While there I got a scholarship to the Australian Ballet School which I took up, and was there for two and a half years, then joined the company itself. I was with the AB for three years, that first time. We did an American tour and I decided I wanted to see more. On tour you just can't

see enough of what's going on. So I went to New York on an Arts Council scholarship. I studied everywhere and saw tons of theatre.

Shankbridge: Then came Peggy van Praagh's ballet workshop?

Murphy: Yes, that was FTD. It was an interesting year, works by Don Asher, Leigh Warren, John Meehan. But their funds got rather short, so I went to London, to the Royal Ballet, it made me miserable. It was exactly what I didn't want to be doing.

Shankbridge: What did you want?

Murphy: Contemporary dance. Much to everybody's horror I left the Royal Ballet after six months. I mean, you doesn't leave the Royal Ballet — except in a wheelchair. Anyway, I then found a contemporary company that really did please me, the Felix Blasko company. We were a mixture of all nationalities, and almost everything we did was by contemporary composers. I remember a whole *Ilse Gruniger*. Working in that company



Graeme Murphy:

made the whole thing about dance come to life.

Shoobridge: Who did the choreography there?

Murphy: Blanks himself was very much a one-man choreographer, it was fascinating. It was with the company two and a half years — we became almost chummy about what he was going to do next. And nothing was ever simple, stereotyped or dull. The audiences — [Blanks toured mostly to youth, and we had an enormous university audience across Europe] — could never have realized all that variety was the work of one man.

Shoobridge: Then back to Australia?

Murphy: Yes, but before that was a rather frightening back-breaking episode [with Janet Varain, who was on leave from the All Nations Europe with a company called Ballet Caravan]. We got to Manila — they were happy and goodfrye and returned to Australia. We were offered positions then with the All, but I preferred to set out for a year. I'm glad I did, because I really got to know what was going on in Australia. In the Australian Ballet you get to know what's going on in the Australian Ballet.

Shoobridge: So you free-lanced?

Murphy: Yes. A struggle to make ends meet, but it was a very creative year working with a lot of regional companies, creating works. But it was financially sparse, so we repeated the All and enjoyed it for a year. Then, finally, London — and a telegram about the NSW position — and here we are.

Shoobridge: Before we talk about the present, what about your stay in New York?

Murphy: New York is definitely the dance capital at the moment. They've developed real audiences which gives us much more room for experimentation. Here, if you try to be brave, you can win 25 people over, but you'll lose 15. Really.

Shoobridge: Any choreographic influence from there?

Murphy: The Jeffrey company as a whole inspired me more than any particular choreographer, what struck me was the format of chore programming, wide, balanced sort of experience. Actually, because I started in Australia, I wasn't influenced by any particular choreographer, I just didn't work with or even see enough choreographers here. At the Australian Ballet there was some Arthur Hildesheim, Ballet, but I don't think any of them influenced me.

Shoobridge: You missed the parts of experimentation?

Murphy: Yes. In New York they've built up an audience that is adjusted to experiment. On the other hand, in England, if you try something different you tend you can get an amazing backlash: people there are so conditioned. But then again, because contemporary dance hasn't been seen so widely here in Australia, people don't have pre-conceived notions. I remember working in Queensland: modern dance went especially well in country areas where there's no ballet tradition to get in the way.

Shoobridge: Yes. A certain sense of adventure is often called for, isn't it? After all, as Sandberg and Prosen were saying — about Australia's capacity to stretch thought — we really haven't got that European tradition here, we're far more eclectic.

Murphy: Right. We don't have to adhere to anything from overseas, I don't think it would work if we did. We have to work in a direction that's peculiarly our own. The programs just aren't here to create another *Richard Danc or Rambert*.

Shoobridge: So, your company?

Murphy: Yes, our dancers themselves feel that is a way, too. The influences in the company are enormous — Graham dancers, "classical" dancers were a nice melting pot of everything. And we're producing something that's our own.

Shoobridge: But it does help, surely, now and then to import a big name choreographer?

Murphy: Ah yes. And not just from the public's point of view. We need reputations. And there are so many fabulous influences overseas, we must bring them over — to broaden our outlook, to widen our vocabulary.

Mind you, there aren't enough opportunities for Australian choreographers to get their works performed. I do think that here, in the company, the new Workshop Theatre audience situation will work wonders. Yes, I know, so many choreographers have had workshops up to here. They've done dance. So it won't be just a workshop, there'll be the chance for them to be publicly performed.

And another thing. With our reputation as of all this, we are ever ready to participate. And — this is another of my pet hobbies — the ballets have to sit the reason. You don't have just a standard set for the Opera House, another for Hyde

Park and so on, you fit the venue. That way you can appeal to a wide audience, which is our principal aim this year. This is going to be an audience-building year.

Shoobridge: Do you have hopes for interest in dance?

Murphy: Of course we're ambitious to be much more of a national company. We have plans to tour that that's a money-losing process. It's Sydney first. I want Sydney to know it has an excellent modern dance company of its own. And Sydney is sort of the workshop situation.

Shoobridge: Yes, the studio thing is important. When Mince Cunningham left Graham's company, he could afford only small studio performances. His whole style of dance was evolved from those small performances.

Murphy: Our audience is so hopeful, so full of potential. It pleases me so much. I hear a growing up there with the borrowing and saving. This is good trying ground. We're going to try to encourage a good cross-section, not just cater to our followers. And we can, because we don't have enormous overheads. We can make use of diversity.

Shoobridge: That's obviously important to you — diversity, the wide repertoire. What other plans do you have in these terms?

Murphy: I want us to overwork on other territories: dance — theatre — drama. It's a great possibility — and one that hasn't been tapped here, though a lot by others overseas. We have interesting dancers here with strong personalities and we want to co-work with straight theatres here in Sydney. Perhaps the fringe theatres.

And there are other things: local companies have expressed great interest in writing works for us, we want to involve live musicians.

And there are other things: local companies have expressed great interest in writing works for us, we want to involve live musicians.

Shoobridge: To round off being an artistic director?

Murphy: Oh, I've enormous qualms. I've never been one before. Not even been an assistant. All I can say is I'll try damn hard, with my staff, and be prepared to head warnings from inside and outside the company. But, well, ultimately it's my responsibility. I hope I can do the company good and help towards as much development and progress as they've had in the past five years.



The Overcoat: an underview by Tim Robertson

Jack Hibbard has a svelte gallow, a high snort — like a kiosk shop, such that a cat always knows when the Doctor is in and well pleased. There is a harsh critical thrust to his look, a deep appreciation of the layman and the not-so, more than a touch of shill and derision and a tendency to become mean. It matches the high comic style of his writing all the way from *Epitaphs to the Overcoat*. The appeal of his language is that it pools the resources of the latrine and the interview, applying to a fund of slang and creative syntax for discursive cohesion. What it enjoys is the urge for robust verbal occasion, preposterous combination and over-earnest. Things can run amok. Early on, characters like Epic, Nostalgia, La Gorgonzola, Kafka and Salazar were provided with a body of language that is somewhat unreasonable theatrically — jargonistic, trite and gloriously small. As Hibbard becomes more playwright, less doctor, and has more actors about him, the style becomes more a quipster's amateur. Bull and Mousetrap juggle the dialect of the tribe while exclaiming fancy words and *One of Nature's Gentleman* is a great vehicle for actors with consciences of any sort. It is arguably the best comic three-hander in Australian theatre, pulling the ritual behaviour of pub-based power struggle in the framework of the makeshift sketch.

While Monk O'Neil lingers with Peter Frost, Mrs Rablinski, not to mention Phil Lay and Chrissie Grimsel, the stretch of a literary imagination is bound by the downish business of preferring everyday measures, usually eating and excreting the past, talking to sons and the dead. The off-muscle comparison to the early plays of Beckett is due, I think, to the treatment of Monk's dying days as a series of turns, the actor attacks the scenes of time past with the props of the present and inevitably traps into the present again. The old player's taste for aphorism, the high flown phrases rarely put, his impotence and distinction, his ironic and uncommittal regard on existence — maybe these as well, feed academic speculation that he is in fact the Knapp of One-Time Hill. However, the challenge and rest in the language, related almost as food and drink, makes Monk's cuisine and his poetry as it is altogether his own. Imagination is futile here, not merely unable to do. The central image is Monk's hat and instrument as a man returning and forlorn with his own outrageous waste "a double but promising sapling" to replace the hairy and outlandish philistines he cut down.

When Peter Cummings was rehearsing *The Overcoat*, one of his worries was that Kak was going to be a casual son of Monk. Perhaps it was the going business, the man alone, sold comfort given circumstances and the feeling he was doing

character theatre. Compared with the Trough Theatre of *Disembodied* and Hibbard's exuberant variations on popular myth — *Captain Macgregor*, *Les Daves*, and *A Year in Werthe* — the theatrical experience is dark and hermetic. As characters, Monk and Kak are essentially different: Kak is a virgin voter, tormented by basic needs and the messianic theory of the world. Monk is his own anthropologist and, while he is stuffed by his girth and mortality, remains the master of ceremonies of his last rites. Kak is cleaned out by his landlady. Monk has known shit, so thinks he has, Kak has only known death. Monk is accommodated, but for Kak the only overcoat is after death and that takes the form of a practical joke.

Monk is integral to every Hibbard play. In *The Overcoat* it is dominant and a heavy weight of the writing is thrown into a cycle of eight songs, the burden of which is that this is the worst of all possible worlds.

*The world does not quarrel more its words
Behind the warmth of cross and cord
Shivers a continent of words*

While spiders copulate with planets.

Monk Frost's quirky, eclectic score for the singer and band lightens the shades of Kak's agony and makes a contented old view of it possible. One reaction is that the

gritiness of this view is too unattractive. Subjective, nihilist even, I believe it has its well-earned roots in Hibbard's former readings among the old, infirm and alcoholic and in his observation of the bitter pit of Guttmann theatre — cultural expatriation, Wiedertänke, Breda. Most immediately it connects with the floppy-free grotesquerie of Gogol.

Nikolai Gogol died nearly by medical practice in 1852 something with seven inches soaking his lung, writing none. A nightmare death that should happen only in a farce or the extraordinary comic course he created himself, particularly in his short stories *The Nose*, *The Diary of a Madman* and *The Overcoat*. The reason his work has been so approached in satirical tones is his reason, both comic and painful, of a cruel and chilly world. People take leave of their senses, men take leave of their people and overcoats, like bicycles, wheel through the night. The best of Gogol's comedy is of things and odds and odds that don't fit, that don't or won't, systematising all absurd systems that don't work and the weight of the path that do. Also he is not under stopping.

His play *The Government Inspector* has undergone many famous modern realisations from Meyerhold on. Meyerhold probably doesn't know he wrote *Tore and Rube* before Oscar Wilde was a trouble. *The Diary of a Madman* has been a vehicle for Brecht's one man shows for years — Jonathan Hardy through Peter O'Shaughnessy to Nicol Williamson.

So at this time when the national toes are pinched or frozen off, J Hibbard goes into the opportunity shop of literature and comes out with Gogol's *Overcoat*. The man is not an idiot. There is something about the 1842 hand-me-down. Decadently, so less, acknowledged that "we all of us come out from under Gogol's overcoat".

There have been other refs — Freddy Chappell's debut at with Jewish subtext in *The Sensitive Overcoat* and Mankiwitz made the movie. Another, better, Russian version dates from the thirties with the dignity of the Tsar's labours artistically enabled. Hibbard's taste for the insane and morbid character, language and circumstance matches the original material more aptly in his own words, "one of his constant dramatical quirks has been his juxtaposition of hardship and humour, the real and the absurd — so to ridicule the victim but attempting to give a real glow to the cold side of his dilemma." — The analysis of isolation, cold hunger and death.

Gogol called St Petersburg "the graveyard of dreams" and this is the location of *The Overcoat*. The action is not stuck in historical time and place. Kak's agony is generalised in a city that corresponds to Kafka's barbarous bureaucracy, with Chaplin's Skid Row, with the Metropolis of Impotence and the Suburbs of the Aburd.



Peter Cummings as Kak in the APG production directed by Tim Robertson.

■ Tim Robertson was the first director of *The Overcoat* for the Australian Performing Group. He is a member of the APG Collective.

The Overcoat: Underview 2 by Malcolm Robertson

"There is a poetic and lyric quality to it, very theatrical, I feel that is all too subtle for the public. It will take time for it to be deemed all the shadings. Also, how many stupidities we will have to hear about this play! Nevertheless it will have a tremendous success because as a play it holds you. It is a completely a whole that one cannot detach a single word from it. It may be that I am prejudiced, yet I cannot find any defect in this play." Constantin Stanislavski wrote these words to Anton Chekhov after first reading *The Cherry Orchard* in October 1900. These thoughts by the famous actor-director struck me, when I read them last week in the newly opened, handsome performing arts section of the Victorian State Library, as being particularly pertinent to the first production of Jack Hibberd's adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's short story, *The Overcoat*, presented by the Australian Performing Group at the Prism Factory in September 1976.

Because of my own theatre commitments, I was not able to see Jack Hibberd's *The Overcoat* until the last week of its season. Obviously, I was told before the beginning of the performance that the response to the play, both by the Melbourne critics and the public, had been poor. I could detect that subtlest air of misplaced aloofness and rejection in the atmosphere of the Prism Factory on that night. The audience for the performance was indeed small. I felt an initial embarrassment for the five members of the orchestra as they surveyed their kind of customers while tuning their instruments before the performance. As always on these depressing occasions, my heart went out to the actors, who were already preparing in one of the back rooms. How were they looking under these circumstances? What costumes would they have put in their performances to compensate for the paucity of response from this minuscule audience?

The first scene was played, the first song sung, and any sense of embarrassment, or more adequately, pity, I had been feeling for the plight of the actors, playwright, musicians and singer was forgotten. What I witnessed that night at the Prism Factory was an experience in the theatre that was rare and wonderful. Who had said *The Overcoat* was unsuitable? Who had misinterpreted the word "Italian"?

For the first time since the production of Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, directed by George Ogilvie at the Melbourne Theatre Company in 1971, a genuine effort was being made to broaden the experience of our actors and open up to them a European experience of theatre. Ironically, Mr Ogilvie's production, in its attempt to disorient the audience and plunge them headlong into the nightmare world of Gogol, had also been greeted with critical abuse.

* Also, how many stupidities we will



Evelyn Krupar in *The Tailor's Wife*

have to hear about this play?"

What made the advent of *The Overcoat* at the Prism Factory all the more remarkable, was that it was being done in a fashion of the supposedly individualistic style of playwright and seting. Here was the playwright of *White Rain White Wind* and *Dumbbells* genuinely and successfully employing a European approach to fashion a play that, while acknowledging its European lineage, was not merely an adaptation but a piece of writing that stands as dramatic literature in its own right. *The Overcoat* is finely disciplined playwrighting. By the word, "discipline", I do not mean the playwright has been subverted by the dramatic centre. The discipline Jack Hibberd has accepted in *The Overcoat* is a respect for the original short story by

Gogol. This discipline has, in turn, allowed the playwright ultimate freedom. *The Overcoat* is the most successful and challenging piece of theatre Jack Hibberd has written since *A Sketch of the Immortal*. It may be that I am prejudiced yet I cannot help thinking that Jack Hibberd's *The Overcoat* and what the play contributes to our deepening Australian experience will in time equal the contribution Benoit Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* has made to the European theatre over the last few decades. With *The Overcoat*, as indigenous playwright has for the first time shown all the shadings of our Anglo-Saxon background and attitudes towards the theatre.

It would be regrettably to suggest that all was well with the production of *The Overcoat* at the Prism Factory. There were lapses in style by some of the actors that inevitably blunted the vision of the playwright. Inexperience and the danger of rationalisation, robbed the play of the important juxtaposition of "hardship and humour, the real and the absurd" that is central to Gogol and dramatically important to Hibberd. The comic-like setting by Sony Parker had the effect of dwarfing the audience as it ascended into the rafters of the Prism Factory. The "stage" platform provided for the actors in this setting failed to convey the claustrophobia essential for them to let the out their writhed customer. The audience at no time felt like the puppet-master manipulating and being manipulated by these fragile victims and their mad ruses.

It was in the hauntingly obvious music by Martin Friedl that the production substantially upheld the integrity of Gogol and the vision of Hibberd. Jan Friedl, in the singer-commentator, sought with something between the right mood of detached irony. All the positive aspects of the production came beautifully together in the deathbed scene of the play's protagonist, Kih. Here the director, Tim Robertson, the actors, Peter Carrigan and Evelyn Krupar, and Jan Friedl brought the play both challengingly and convincingly to life.

At this stage, it would be a negative response to list the possible reasons for the insensitive critical reaction in Melbourne to this production of *The Overcoat*. Suffice it to say, that if a play of this quality can be dismissed by the majority of stage in Melbourne their rejection must stand as an indictment of their expertise.

The belief that can be applied to counter this initial rejection of *The Overcoat* is the same belief that has been applied to the playwright throughout history of drama: the belief Stanislavski so aptly provided for Chekhov, when he wrote, "It will take time for it [the audience] to understand all the shadings." Nevertheless it will have a tremendous success.

I can count Jack Hibberd's *The Overcoat* will be an integral part of our dramatic literature for a long time.



Jack Hibberd

THE OVERCOAT



Ladies' English Standing Paper Collar



An adaptation from Gogol
by Jack Hibberd

CHARACTERS

KAIK,
A CLERK,
DEPARTMENTAL HEAD
TAILOR
TAILOR'S WIFE
THE MAN
A POLICEMAN
THE IMPORTANT PERSON
A CLERK
LANDLADY
GOGOL

NOTES

- 1 The play requires a small ensemble of minimums and two color-wearers: one female, one male
- 2 The play requires at a maximum five actors: four male, one female
- 3 Propositions are suggested for roles of songs and scenic declamations. They can, however, be introduced on an principal Brechtian manner should propositions be felt to encumber the design.
- 4 Kaik should be pronounced to rhyme with work, as clerk, not mark or cork
- 5 I prefer the actor and director interested in a depiction of Gogol's in Mahler's Delusion back on the author
- 6 I have balked at a description of the Tailor's Wife. She should, however, be strong, earthy, tough, shrewd, and in no way the conventional beauty
- 7 The adaptation is necessarily free, a theatrical double commentary and ball-pike from the springboard of Gogol's master prose — Jack Hibberd



HOME

Blindness After a while, a small radiator cowers on Kaik is even knowing, hunched beside it warming himself. He wears long underwear and socks, each with the tag protruding through. He is jerked forward, and morose, with thick rimmed glasses and a shroud of disheveled hair. He shivers and chatters with the extreme cold.

A faint light comes up on an absurdly threadbare overcoat suspended on a hook, a crutch. He looks at below.

He wears a shirt, and does it. He wears some trousers and puts them on. He goes across to the overcoat, runs at it for a moment, then puts on his boots. He stamps his feet.

He removes the coat from its hanger, holds it up to the light disparagingly then dons it. He throws into his hands then inserts them in pockets.

Surprise

He extracts a thin slice of top bread from one pocket, and an old pickled cucumber from the other. He sniffs the cucumber.

Delighted

He walks to the radiator, sits, and eats noisily greedily.

After a while, fade to black-out

SONG OF OUR CITY

In our city the wind never ceases,
From every cold quarter it howls,
In ice-age gusts and howlous.
In our city the sun never sparkles,
From every cold quarter it howls,
In ice-age gusts and howlous.

Both winter and summer it rains,
It drips the salt of marbles,
The footpaths to gray as drizzle.
In our city the rain never ceases,
But molts in both seasons and dries,
With molts and dries,
To heats of a formal dress.

In our city the men never buckle,
Their laughter falls both cold and pork,
As women greedily suckle
More about in the dust.

OFFICE

Kaik sits at his desk. He wears the uniform coat of a minor clerk. His overcoat hangs nearby. He peers miserably and morosely about. He stares at his hands, will rigid with the cold, rubs them together and places his fingers in preparation for the day's labor. He takes a pen, runs at it lovingly, then pretenses writing on an

imaginary sheet of paper until he is caught that his fingers are supple. He laughs. He stares at the in-tray, whereon lies a single letter. He leans passionately across and snags it. He scrutinizes it. Pause.

Kaik Plores!

Pause. He spreads the letter meticulously and ritualistically on his desk, takes the pen and a clean sheet of paper, prepares to write, then his second thoughts. Pause. A throb on.

Pause. He bows himself for the task, a mass of worry. He opens the letter, slowly and painstakingly, reading some of it out.

with reference to Departmental Order No. KY 212345? . . .

Pause

(Perplexed) KY 212345 . . . ?

He scratches his head, until he is suddenly flummoxed.

Kaik (as he writes slowly) There has obviously been a clerical blunder. (Pause. Alphas 1. Beta on end.) (Nod by m.)

His fear and paranoia settle down.

(As he writes, building up indignance) (The order number should clearly read KY 212345?)

Pause

(Triumphant) I know it! The rest of a quarter—

Pause

(As he writes, emphatically and proudly) Would you please notify the relevant situation?

He studies his handiwork, blows on the ink to dry it, pins the two sheets together, and places them in the out-tray. He leans back, pleased. Pause.

He suddenly peers closely into his inkwell, then removes a large hair of ink from a drawer in his desk, and taps up the wall. He looks suspiciously around, has a quick up from one of the bottle's strains, then replaces it. Pause.

He bellows, then paces haughty about. He examines the in-tray clearly, air back and blank.

Dregs thought

He takes off his glasses and rubs them with a cloth handkerchief. As he does so, a Clerk enters, places another letter in the in-tray and leaves, taking the letter from the out-tray with him.

Kaik finishes clearing his glasses, puts them on, and it takes the in-tray again.

Kaik Aha!

He takes the letter, reads, then cowers it. (As he writes) . . . With reference to the aforementioned order, there seems to have been a clerical blunder. This order was

filled fifty pages ago by the then Under-Secretary of State, now Superintendent of the, in charge of matters, thumb-down, I mean ticks, and ink.

Kaik trembles, horrified. He hurriedly puts her copy to the original and puts them in the in-tray. Pause.

His gaze returns to the in-tray. He looks puzzled, picks them up, scratches his head, then suddenly realizes and drops them into the out-tray. He breathes a deep sigh of relief. Pause.

He stares ahead, blank and depressed.

LUNCH

Kak goes to his coat and removes a parcel wrapped in wax-paper. He takes it to the dark, looks around suspiciously, then opens it, revealing a small cooked pig trotter, three green peas, and a cabbage stalk. He removes a plate, knife and fork from a drawer, puts the food on the plate, regards his life ruefully, then starts to eat.

SONG OF THE FUTURE

— one man's pain

The future is full of doubt, fears and hope,
Of archaologies in the sun,
Where the strange smell of ozone hangs
And cyberspace opens your tongue.

The future is full of up and down,
Of currents each day in the year,
Where young lovers meet, wars are won,
And when it rains it rains and then.

The future is full of anxiety and wit,
Of anxiety run amok,
Where the elderly sit, browns and fit,
And death is just a last toast.

Kak rises during the song. He takes up. He wipes his mouth with the handkerchief, relaxes, belches. Pause.

The Clerk enters, removes the papers from the out-tray, goes across to the case, looks it, and shakes his head in disgust. Kak slowly turns round and looks at her sternly. Pause.

Clark: Mmm.

Kak turns back, startled. The Clerk stands for a moment and config the control or.

Someone needs a permit.

Kak: I always open my hand at the corridor.

Clark: I suggest you open your window. Kak looks thoroughly bemused. The Clerk leaves. Pause. Kak sighs.

Kak: I can't smell a thing. I shall open that young chap to the Departmental Head.

The same clerk enters, but now at the Departmental Head and entered in a respectful coat and a large hat.

De Head: Kak?

Kak: Supervisor sir?

De Head: You're late with a seventy plan on your Corset?

Kak: Correct, Your Eminence. Though it only came in late yesterday.

De Head: I believe you deserve a chance.

Kak: Excellent.

(Handing him a letter.) Take this, and outspace it from the first-person singular to the third-person plural.

Kak sighs, takes the letter. The Departmental Head leaves. Kak reads the letter carefully, takes paper and pen.

Kak (murmurs aloud): With reference to Departmental Invoice (Pause) is received (Pause) Unprocessed.

Confused, he copies for a while.

(Sings and reads aloud): — number 5028182. I am of the opinion, I submit,

that I was not in error but that an undelivered item, I mean I, am.
Kak, groans. He reads the letter again, and starts work nervously, then stops.

Third-person plural?

He counts on his fingers. Pause.

(In profound anguish.) I used to know all the numbers and persons. Later was my last person.

He trembles and applies himself desperately.

Kak (singing and reading aloud): They are of the opinion, they submit, that they was in error but that.

He copies the next section. Pause.

I can't do it.

Pause. He breaks down into sobs. Pause. The Departmental Head enters.

De Head: Finished?

Kak shakes his head. The Departmental Head switches up Kak's effort and announces it perfectly, reads down through an opaque hand-lens or whatever. You have just botched the promotional opportunity of a lifetime.

Kak (murmurs): I am concerned myself just copying, sir.

De Head: You could do with a new coat. Kak (stare and indignation): No. Your Proficiency. It wants but a few repairs.

De Head: Stop squandering your money on women and bath food.

Kak (as if he'd never heard of them): Women?

De Head: Obviously the cost of a child-care.

Kak: Please, sir, don't dazzle me with statistics.

De Head: I would not wipe my pants with a.

Kak: Such language sir.

De Head: Holding it up to the light. That's not a coat's a pant suit.

Kak: I'll have a stitched new work.

The Departmental Head crosses up the piece of paper he holds and flips it on to the desk.

De Head: Get back to work.

Kak scuttles back to his desk. The Departmental Head leaves. Kak picks up the ball of paper and places it in the out-tray. He turns about, stunned and ingenuitous. Pause.

Kak: Women?

THE TAILOR'S SONG OF THE TAILOR'S WIFE

— one stranger's delusion

My husband is a rascal, sir.

Who gambles night and day.

Like a new-born baby in a cot.

I work my elbow to the bone.

Cleaning up his cot and nose,

It is a wonder I'm not a stone.

He hardly does a stitch.

And when I'd long complain,

He calls me, you passed it, a bitch.

A lady of letters can never show,

So when he talks of love,

I got the message loud.

I often dream of other men,

Or simply flying away.

Tell me, ladies, again.

How do I change into an elephant from a bat?

(In a daze.) Stop squandering!

With (shaggy): Oh he's awake. So soon. At five in the afternoon. It must have been my baroque of love, so remote to the Casanova of the world. Or could it have been the perfume emanating from last week's gilette? The quickest way to a man's heart is via his stomach. Good morning, my little monster!

The Tailor sits up. He sports a patch over one eye, the other is severely crossed. He is sleepily happy.

I take (greenward and anxiously) Count from here, lovebirds.

With: At once. Note how I float symmetrically towards him.

She sits up, reading intently. He turns his head to fix his under eye on her.

Tailor (shakes with emotion and remorse): Perhaps.

She suddenly changes her seat across the side of the head. He looks on the floor, gets up feverily, runs his fist in disbelief and tries to fix her in his half-gaze. She walks up and takes him by the chin, then drops him with a blow from the other hand. He lies inert on the floor.

Takes T.O.

With: Stand up like a man.

Tailor: I can't.

With: Do you want the bugle treatment?

Tailor (sitting up): No. Anything but that. (Pause) A drink, perhaps?

She stands over him, showing her shirt over her head.

With: You asked for this.

Tailor: A little, like the U.S. is a spring. She frowns sternly. He passes out.

The Butler enters a cold spoon.

Pause. He comes to his eye rolled back into his skull.

Now get up there and work. He staggered across to the table, clatters up against and starts crying.

He's been working on that rat for three years and is halfway up one leg.

Takes: He is a tall man.

With: I haven't the heart to tell him he's dead. (Short pause) He's dead.

Takes: Who?

With: Your customer.

He breaks down into sobs and sobs.

Takes: He was such a man.

With: At least we got the deposit.

Takes: I shall send the family the best of my wishes.

With: A kind of legacy?

Takes: I always knew he had one foot in the grave.

With: Give me that.

Takes: No.

They fight over the money bag. Kak enters with his coat.

Kak (loudly): Excuse me.

Takes and With: A customer?

With (to Takes): Sit up.

Kak (murmurs): Sorry.

Takes: He looks healthy enough.

With: Would you like a drink, land-lord?

Takes (sympathetically): Super?

Kak (loudly): Er — I never drink off duty.

With (usually as she dresses) *Creme de Cacao*
 Kak (turns to the unattended part) How sure?
 Taker (thinks after his wife) Make it three?
 Kak (It must be because to have a wife Taker! She is a jewel on the helmet of womanhood)
 Kak I can see who meant the trousers
 Taker: I take no diaperap. But? You understand?
 Wife (contending with two drinks) Here we are, Chocoda is with a dash of corpse
 They drink. The Taker coughs at his wife (Elegantly) To your taste?
 Kak: Delicous
 Taker: Ah, there is so much work. Orders, orders. They never stop. See this treasure bag. It's my talisman for the morning
 Kak: Water
 Wife (glances) refusing to be exposedly
 Taker (glaring): Water, water, water, spring. I am fit to the table
 Wife: He has had to put his pants up
 Kak (unconvinced): I've done my dash too
 Wife: Well, what can we do you for?
 Kak: This coat
 Taker (taking off Coat)
 Kak: What would you ask to report it?
 The Taker takes a handker, holds it to the eye and under the coat from a believe angle. A moment of silence
 Taker (taking his head): Threadbare.
 Kak (laughs): Threadbare!
 Taker: A coat for the night
 Wife: Would you like another lapset?
 Taker: You could always use it as a necktie
 Wife: Or a necktie
 Taker: For your wife
 Kak: But I have no wife
 Taker: A man of the world, eh?
 Wife: I know it. One of those athletic bachelor types
 Taker: Look at his eyes
 Wife: Low and mustard
 Taker (woman): Fortissimo?
 Taker
 Kak: All I want is a few patches on my coat
 Taker: Out of the question
 Wife: If I draw an analogy, Sir Bubo, you can't be featherboard a house that has no frame
 Taker: She has a way with language...
 Wife: Yes, in different circumstances I could have been a deep thinker, a poet perhaps, or a tropical artist, taking young lads into the atmosphere
 Taker
 Kak (as the ending of his wife) What do I do now?
 Taker: Order a new coat
 Kak: I couldn't
 Taker: You're a disgrace to the real service
 Wife: Mankind
 Kak (sniff): How much?
 Taker (pondering gravely): Well, with a cheap but ingenious material and a collar composed of dog's fur instead of

ostrichskin, nothing more than a hundred
 Wife: Nothing less either
 Kak (apparently): A hundred?
 They end. Kak plunges into a chair. Pause
 Taker: The husband's having second thoughts.
 Wife: I suppose we could part it down to sixty nine
 Taker: Of course we'd have to start on the bottom a little
 Wife (leaning over Kak): It would still do up
 Taker: All the young blades want to do for that age
 Wife: Why, only the other day the Sultan of Montenegro called in with her basket of men — a stained lot, I might add — and demanded some quick repairs
 Taker: I should've been a surgeon
 Taker
 Wife: Ninety-eight?
 Taker: The bloke's a dill
 Wife: I think he's a scampkins. The kind you'd sleep with on a dash. I can see us now. Green palms and ochre sands. The milk of cocoons on our lips, the twang of rifle pointers, our bellies glowing with the dew of love
 She moves at Kak
 Taker: Madam
 Taker
 Kak: Ninety-eight?
 They end. They smile. He smiles
 Wife: Agreed?
 He nods, painfully. The Taker falls off the table
 A drink, Cynology, a drink!
 She attacks Kak, envelopes him with hugs and kisses. The Taker dashes out, running smack into a wall at the door in
 (Standing back) Aren't you beautiful?
 Taker: Kak Shakes
 You shall be dressed like a prince
 The Taker serves with a bottle and pours an extraordinary fluid into the two glasses
 The Wife and Kak smile the pleasure. They raise them up like Taker raises the bottle
 All: To the overcoat!
 They follow. Taker
 Kak (mournfully): How can I possibly pay that much?
 Taker: That's your problem
 Taker
 Wife: You can't manage now
 Taker
 Taker and Wife: You wear our only dress
 They both stand dejected, dejected. Taker
 Kak rubs his eyes and stands sorrowfully.
 End. Pause

SONG OF THE SOCIAL CRIPPLES

— over effluence and
 caricature in opulence

Despite the paganism of our toes
 And the warts in our lungs,
 Despite the ugliness of our clothes
 And the handbells on our tongues,

We know the world will change,
 Not into a land of milk and honey,
 But a place of apocalyptic pain,
 And free from parasitic money

Despite the stench of our teeth
 And the dung of our chests
 Despite the stiches for a wreath
 And the handbells on our vests,
 We know etc.

Despite the money raised our throats
 And the scrofula on our skin,
 Despite the lesions of our coats
 And the wife's distress, etc.,
 We know etc.



THE OFFICE: AN INTERIOR MONOLOGUE

Kak sits at the desk before a plate which contains a pickled onion and a small cup of parsley. His coat hangs nearby, above half its former length and even more toward Taker

Kak: I am one facing children from head to toe. There has been no summer whatsoever this year. Usually the thermometer selects a little. Even the garments have picked up. One of the worst last-year I can remember. I've been forced to put coats to keep the radiator in full belt. Can't even afford the luxury of an occasional pig trotter for lunch. I am skin and bone. My coat looks more like a nightgown. I am a disgrace to the civil service. It's no joke. My confidants shun me as if I were the last of the lepers. Not that I've ever exhibited much in the way of social style or pluck. Hardly the life of the party. He he. But this is gruesome. I feel naked (Pause) What do I do? Starve myself to enter universities and buy a new coat? I've heard of men doing it when they return on leather. Perhaps I could define some metrics from this desk? There might even be a few calories left in my coat. Man days out live by bread alone. He he. What if it is to have a season of hunger?
 He starts glancing at the plate. Pause

AN EXTERIOR MONOLOGUE

Kak quarters the coat with a knife. He enters one quarter. Taker
 Kak: Photographs (Pause) Good for the intellect (Pause) He walks through the

panley | Vietnam C. (Pense)

Kak takes out a hand pencil, inserts it into a shepheress attached to the side of his desk then winds. He collects some of the shavings and puts them in his pipe. He says to me: Pense: The Departmental Head comes and watches.

Knocking (Pense)

D. Head: I've been watching that cogder for months. He's in a decline. In fact, I ordered a time-and-motion study on the bopper. The results were horrendous. He helped his productivity in a week. A departmental record. The shame. What can I do? You can't make a member of the civil service. The only answer, staff it, is to create yet another division of the service for him, lower his wage, cut his prestige, and hope to Jesus that the expense has no greater effects. If only he took a firm grip of himself and disgorged his lack of attention to his duty. A cheerful man and some legendary waste work would be ideal.

The Departmental Head walks across to the desk. Pense

(Pointing to the design) May I?

Kak: Of course. Your pleasure.

The Departmental Head enters two quarters with a fork and sets them with relief as Kak watches pleased. Pense

D. Head: Kak

Kak: Sir?

D. Head: I have some good news for you. (Murmurs) Kak smiles | You're demoted.

Kak: Gosh

D. Head (amused) Is that all you can say? Kak: I am immune to all the shops and stores of fate. Your Luckless. I have a mission in life.

D. Head (disbelieving) Oh yes

Kak (semi-delirious) To buy a new coat. (Pense)

D. Head: Allow me to be the first to congratulate you.

Kak extends a hand which the D. Head ignores

Kak: I intend to raise the tone of the entire department.

D. Head (wiping his eyebrows) And enter into more society?

Kak: I hadn't thought of that.

D. Head: No. I. But I'd like suggest, in all humility, a spot of plastic surgery.

Kak: A moulted? A moulted?

D. Head: Something more radical, Kak. A daily massage of the face with rough sandpaper, the application of a hot iron each night to the nose, and finally the suspension of a pound of calves from each ear. Smooth skin, a flat nose, and long ears are definitely in fashion.

Kak: Anything you say, sir.

D. Head: Instead of gropes on scullery floors I can see elegant dowdies in insulated parks, instead of demotion, promotion instead of odium from your cohorts, true consolation.

Kak (sincerely) That's what I'd treasure most, sir.

D. Head: Plus the warmth.

Kak: I suffer in martyrdom from the cold.

D. Head: I shall even invite you round to dinner.

Kak: Haze. Rheasty eyes. Chronic

goodness. Unintentional tension.

D. Head: In the servants' quarters.

Kak: My bum feels like an egg.

D. Head (trumping) As long as you don't ejaculate much.

Kak: Of course (Pense)

(Offering the glass) Some more, sir?

D. Head: Thanks.

He drains the last quarter of wine.

Kak (adventuring) I shall make my counter-claim efforts to achieve this noble and D. Head: Well, fine of all double yourself over this job.

He returns a wad of papers from a packer and shoves them in Kak's in-tray.

Kak (heartily): Every deed has a silver lining.

The D. Head exits.

SONG CONCERNING KAK

Day by day he wastes away
in an effort to compete.

His diet consists of flies

And the sad passage from his fat.

Day by day he wastes away

in an effort to improve.

His bed is as cold as clay

While the rain dribles through his roof.

Day by day he wastes away

in an effort to expand.

His work is a feast of prey

Eating its victim glibly by greed.



OFFICE OF THE DEPARTMENTAL HEAD

D. Head (travelling at the desk) You wished to see me, Kak?

Kak (gayer and growling) So kind of you to ask me to come, sir.

D. Head: How long have you been waiting?

Kak: A mere week.

D. Head: Get out.

Kak: Please, sir it's about my holiday bonus.

D. Head: You want a holiday?

Kak: Just my bonus.

D. Head (ignoring him) I can recommend the Canary Islands. Kak: Oodles of sun and wine, a Spanish fly that would sting a bulldog, seismic speed, becomes the size of oceans, and bread-battered seaweed clucking their luminous contents.

Kak: I don't think you should speak of women in this way, sir.

D. Head: I wish a virgin. Intense. Pense.

Kak: You bewitch the memory of my mother.

D. Head: You can't messle with your mum (Kak gawks) Open her eyes.

Kak: We could never afford eyes, sir.

D. Head: The mother's an idiot.

Kak: About that bonus. Your Turnover?

D. Head: How much?

Kak: I believe it is twenty.

D. Head: Make it forty.

Kak: Sir?

Kak runs to the D. Head a head, knees and elbows rear in with gratification.

A word fit, sir.

D. Head (wiping his hand with a handkerchief) Don't mention it.

Kak: I shall remember this to my dying day.

D. Head: Don't punish yourself unnecessarily. Kak.

Kak: I have a reason, sir.

D. Head: Lash out and sport yourself a two-course meal.

Kak (surprised) I couldn't.

D. Head: Well, when do you want it?

Kak: Next year.

D. Head: Next year?

Kak (tentatively): Only took dash in where was man fear to tread.

D. Head: Very apt. Listen. In the meantime I'll invest it for you in government bonds. Naught point two five per cent.

Kak (overwhelmed): Why, thank you, sir.

SONG OF THE ANKLE

— ADAPT

I have a little ankle
And show it everywhere,
It glimmers like a spangle,
And how the poor men stare.

I have a little ankle
And flick it through the air,
Or hold it at an angle,
And how the poor men stare.

I have a little ankle,
In fact I have a pair,
I have to let them dangle,
And how the poor men stare.

Marked: Pause Silence Kak answers Pense. The radiator comes on. Pense

A light comes up slowly on Kak sitting in bed in his underclothes. He looks anxiously, drowsily around, a human creature. Pense

He gets out of bed looking around, tired and suspicious. He looks before the radiator. Pense

Kak: Please, God make them go away. All I want to be is ordinary. Nothing special. Nothing flash. I wouldn't harm a shrewish. There's not a molecule of harm in me. I've never been a deliberate barter in a singletail. Believe me, I am what I am.

Pense: No joke. Pense: Drowsy's Humorous on stage. After a while he looks up. The radiator's light has entered.

Wink. Good evening, sir.

Kak: Good evening.

Wink. Cold?

Kak: Agony.

POUSE: The music ceases.
WIFE: You're lucky to be able to afford a radiator.
KAK: It's the only comfort I have left in my miserable bed.
WIFE: There are cheaper ways of warming that.
KAK *(sighs)*: Please tell me.
WIFE *(giving you one guess)*:
KAK *(hesitating)*: A new coat? *(She snorts scornfully)*: You've come about the material? *(She snorts again)*: Have a seat.
She sits on the floor.
KAK: Comfortable?
WIFE Paradise.
KAK: How's your husband?
WIFE: The very mention of that man brings tears to my eyes.
KAK: Marriage must be a wonderful institution.
WIFE: It takes a lot of beating.
KAK *(overcome)*: I can only speculate.
WIFE *(blowing her)*: What a card!
He waves aside a little Pouse.
KAK: Like a drink?
WIFE: What a offering?
KAK: Yes.
WIFE: Yes?
KAK: I drink nothing else.
WIFE *(amazed)*: The blasted drink my corpse.
KAK: Well I feel the bottle?
WIFE: Don't bother.
KAK: Down to business, eh?
She nods and removes a piece of material from a bag.
WIFE: Two per cent wool.
KAK *(amazed and delighted)*: Really? That all?
WIFE: The real a guaranteed synthetic.
KAK: Good.
WIFE: A bargain at the auction price.
KAK: What a way with language you have!
WIFE *(spreading the material on her lap)*: Would you like a tea?
KAK: *(He feels the material)*:
KAK: It's as soft as a waffle and as strong as a mackerel.
She looks at how drably.
WIFE: Would you like a seat?
He leans over and sniffs.
KAK *(astonished)*: Ah, like the Larks in spring.
WIFE: I'm flattered.
She sniffs at Kak. He looks a little embarrassed.
WIFE *(Smiling)*: Let's try it wrapped around you.
KAK *(staring, awestruck)*: Yes, I am a little underdressed. My deepest apologies.
She wraps the material around him tightly.
Pouse:
WIFE *(sighing, Ah)*: A real Don Giovanni.
She sniffs the material over his neck, then his arm.
WIFE: I will pinch some salt Sebastian for for your collar.
Pouse: She kisses him. He struggles.
KAK: Please? I'm weak from hunger.
WIFE *(grabbing him)*: Be a man.
She lifts him, snuggles in the material, and shows him on the bed. He groans at the sight over his underpants and hugs on top.
Pouse: She wriggles her tail around a little then bounces restlessly up and down on

Kak:
How does it feel to have the shoe on the other foot? Adahony? Riggs? *(He groans)*
Pouse: Hardly a foot. More like a little toe.
Kak *(groans)*: I'm being swallowed up!
WIFE *(blowing up and down)*: One swallow does not make a spring.
Kak *(sobbing)*: Help me, Mother, O parents of creatures!
WIFE: What a lovely!
Kak *(groaning)*: All I want is a new overcoat.

A PROLETARIAN CANTICLE

—one and a quarter act

*It is love that sustains us all.
 A plate of soup is not enough,
 Nor the quotation but essential,
 When circumstances are rough.*
*It is love that sustains us all,
 A market cash is not enough,
 Nor the Porcelain items show,
 When circumstances are rough.*
*It is love that sustains us all,
 A game of cards is not enough,
 Nor the Edwardian music hall,
 When circumstances are rough.*
*It is love that sustains us all,
 A cigarette is not enough,
 Nor the Porcelain girl on call,
 When circumstances are rough.*
Blackout. Drums. A Mammoth on wheels. A light comes up on Kak. He stands a swayed skeleton on his headless coat. Tons of joy stream down his face. The music continues for a while then more general light comes up. The Father looks on and pines at Kak. The music ceases.
Tucker: It is a work of art. *(He glances the coat)*: I have followed him for miles, sometimes from the rear, sometimes from the front, sometimes I have dashed along side him just to catch a glimpse as he struts across the mouth of a distant street. This is the climax of a long and arduous career. *(Pouse)*: I can tell a satisfied customer. *(Pouse)*: Yes. This man will go a long way. My coat, my masterpiece, is a vast success. Why the hell now walks with the liberty of a fox, in an arrogant as a rooster at dusk, and, in the words of my wife, has become overgrown a diploma and outstretched wings, a ping-pong with the quip, the very hands of a pile and raked mackerel. *(Pouse)*: I could follow him to the ends of the earth. Except I crave a drink. *(Music stops. He removes a flask and swigs)*: Cheers, my friend. *(Pouse)*: I wish you all the best. *(Pouse)*:
Wife *(singing)*: There you are.
Tucker *(singing)*: There you are.
Wife: I've been searching the whole city. I thought you'd blown through it last.
Tucker: I've been wandering.
Wife: You fancy little thing.
Tucker: Like a swag?
Wife: Yes. *(She drinks)*.
Tucker: What are we going to do with the money?
Wife: Who cares?

Tucker: I'd suggest a holiday. A couple of weeks at a health spa. Fresh air. Nuts. Even a Convention. Gas. Rummy. Pork on the spot. You want a. *(Pouse)*: I feel I can turn the corner.
Wife *(talking down gently to the arm)*: Not unkind.
Tucker: Trust, my sweet, trust. After all, I only have one eye.
They hug. They hug.
The Departmental Head enters.
D. Head *(sneezing)*: Ah! The new overcoat. Congratulations. Kak. *(Kak bows proudly)*: You're a credit to the civil service. *(Pouse)*: I'll feel tempted to throw a departmental party for the duster.
Kak *(sighs, shaking)*: I don't deserve it, sir.
D. Head: Dred. This is definitely a cause for celebration.
Tucker: Indeed it is.
D. Head: We shall discuss the new spot. We'll meet shortly.
Tucker: Vodka?
D. Head: And who are you?
Tucker *(with great pretence)*: The gentleman's clothes, sir. Monsieur Le Cyclops. And this is the apple of my eye, the Clasp of the media and design department, Madame Pouse. De la Merveilleuse Cause Nostrale.
Wife *(winking her camera)*: Any time, sir.
D. Head *(impressed)*: Delighted. Well, on with the list. Three cheers for Kak. Hip, hip, hurrah!
All Hooty?
The Strangers are thrown by the musicians into the audience. Ballroom mirrored, etc. General a Mammoth starts again grunting louder and more erratic from drunk. There comes round Kak. Feet so blacked out. Jello and the silence.
Pouse: Kak is heard sobbing in the dark.



Light up on Kak half-kneeling. A Man, wearing old cigar bags, stands over him with a large red fat. He smashes Kak in the side of the head nine times. Kak shakes his head, continues to blubber. The Man has Kak upon Pouse.
The Man tips his face impatiently. Kak stands slowly undressing his coat, and howls it to the Man. Kak's underclothes are now pinned and unsheds. The Man shoves the coat over his shoulders, feels good. Pouse.



We repeat to Kak to do up a button. Kak does so, fumbling. *Power*
Man (shouting): Not a word to anyone *(Kak nods)* What do I look like?
Kak: You're indistinguishable from the rest of mankind.
Man (puzzled): What do you mean by that?
Kak: You're, er, anonymous.
Man (angrily): Anonymous, eh?
Kak: Don't be so vague!
We remember Kak fall in the face. Kak falls to the ground. The Man spins on his feet.
Man (growls): Can't stand off!
We parades up and down, in their pink, like a gorilla in a dinner suit. *Power*
I think I'd step along to the ballet tonight.
We leave. *Power* *Kak dies.*
Kak (whisper): Help
We slowly run up
(Leader) Help!
Power
(Scream) Hissings!
Power: A Policewoman enters.
Pol.: What's this infernal racket?
Kak: I want to lodge a complaint.
Pol.: Not another one.
Kak: I've been assaulted and robbed!
Pol.: Yes?
Kak (shouting): A brand-new overcoat.
Pol.: Don't bother me with your trifles.
Kak: It cost me seven years' wages plus the whole of my holiday bonus.
Pol.: A bourgeois, eh?
Kak: Did you see anything?
Pol.: Most shameful. A snatch of moon.
Kak: Nothing else?
The Policewoman studies her head. *Power*
Do you want a description?
Pol.: No.
Kak: He had a mustache —
Pol.: And fast eyes?
Kak: With curled under his chin.
Pol.: And a scar on one cheek?
Kak: Of course.
Pol.: I thought so much.
Kak: And? you going to take all this down?
Pol.: My memory is reliable.
Kak: Where are you stationed?
Pol.: Nowhere in particular. I just patrol the streets.
Kak: When can I report?
Pol.: Next month. Pick a day.
Kak (angrily): Tomorrow, the third.
Pol.: Excellent. I'll make sure I'm not there. *Kak bows.*
Kak: He-he?
Pol.: He-he?
Kak: Thank you for your help.
The Policewoman leaves. *Power* *Kak looks pleased (he yawns).*
I think I should go higher (Power) I did I want to enter officers. Then even more money, and I reached the Chief of Police. His Ubiquity. All to no end! Overcoat

are like beggars he said. They shiver through the night. (Power) I was in complete and utter despair. Detective. (Power) Then some bright spark suggested I should go even further, I should see the important Person who apparently possessed the key to all doors, the combination to all sides, etc. (Power) I did. (Power) What a gentleman! A saint. One who finds sheer time to help the little folk.

SONG OF THE IMPORTANT PERSON

— enter drag-policeman

I believe in discipline,
 The one machine and electric shock,
 I believe in the stick'n whip,
 The separate slipped on a rock.
 I believe in censorship,
 Provided they're of equal rank,
 I believe in contrasting wit
 And drawing attention to it.
 I believe in government,
 The orderly control of ground,
 I believe in the means and end,
 The mongrel state of those I need.
 The Important Person sits down at the desk, takes an enormous gulf, and with supercilious ponderer upon a letter.
 I.P.: Another meddling politician! (Power) I wish they'd stop one! (Power) Anyone would think I was elected. (He chuckles.) (Power) Whichever defrauds the nation. (Power) We did hold an election once. Everyone voted. One hundred per cent display. We decided after that the people were corrupt.
 A Clerk enters. The Important Person, without looking up: Aaaa! Is he the fever Power.
 (I hear) Something pressing?
 Clerk: Your Excellency.
 I.P.: How does it go?
 Clerk: Sorry sir. It Stagnates.
 I.P.: Today is Wednesday.
 Clerk: I beg?
 I.P.: Pardon, again.
 Clerk: A clerk enters outside. He delivers an interview, I mean, sentence.
 I.P.: Does he have any money?
 Clerk: Not a penny.
 I.P.: Tell him I'm busy. He'll have to wait. (The Clerk leaves. Power) What presumption!
 He takes out a long cigarette and lights it. He puffs for a moment, then matches up a driver and reads at. He waves this takes up paper and quill.
 (As he writes) Yes, I do recall those polished and properly done together at school, those evenings at the Café La Bohème when we argued aesthetic, faced at philosophy, and affected conversative coughs about style against afternoon on your estate, beneath a swirl of aspens, beside your gorgeously of a wife, on a cold pipe-producing rock. Ah yes, a bold and astonishing letter. Skipped on the most up cable nostalgia. (Request refused.)
 Power: He signs with a flourish.
 They'll stop to anything.

Power: He reaches back, puts his feet up. Time for a moment.
 Power
 (Remembered) I wish I were at home, in the bottom of the family, leaving to Mozart, in a Star bath, shelling on a sack of money — at the bottom sphere perhaps — snatching up on some postal process. They usually arrange an escape for me — put some poor devil out of his misery.
 He drifts off to sleep. He awakes. After some time the Clerk enters nervously. He picks the paper out. Power with the quill. (Striving a gasp.) How dare you!
 The clerk backs away.
 I've killed myself for him. (Power)
 Clerk: Sorry, I begone.
 I.P.: Is a Friday already?
 Clerk (nodding): The clerk will await you at pleasure.
 I.P. (hesitating): Send the nation soap in.
 He pushes the gas. The Clerk moves in. Kak enters dressed in diamonds and his office coat.
 Kak (aggravatedly): Sir?
 I.P. (staring slack): What's your problem?
 Kak: I have business in my hand.
 I.P.: Strong building.
 Kak: I have come to demand your help.
 I.P.: Who is this arrogant?
 Kak: I have been hindered in every quarter, at a whole galaxy of petty officials, shunks, tapsters and uncomposers. I have heard, however, that you, as a man of status, persons not only power but sensibility, a soft eye for the important man.
 I.P.: I sympathize.
 Kak: I've heard nothing but good reports. I come on bonded knees. You are my last chance.
 I.P. (impressed): What's it all about?
 Kak (urgently): Sir, some work ago —
 I.P.: Just a moment. Have you been through the correct channels?
 Kak (puzzled): Correct channels?
 I.P. (fervid, loud and impetuous): Yes! Filed an application with the appropriate clerk at the ministries, been linked by the Sergeant-at-Arms, pulled by the Taxidermy Council, presented by the Under-Secretary, etc., etc?
 Kak (puzzled): No.
 I.P. (astounded): No?
 Kak (stammering): It's urgent, sir. (Power)
 I.P.: Nothing is urgent. (Power) He fights up his cigarette again. Power: I have all the time in the world. (Power) And back out. Power! An entrance. (Power)
 (Alphabet) I could've been that.

SONG OF OUR CITY

In our city the wind never ceases,
 Fights every cold quarter a howl,
 In one-up gusts and tremors,
 It fakes both rats and ghosts.
 In our city the sun never ceases,
 Both winter and summer it shows,
 In drops the sun of starbles,
 On thoughts to grey as dreams.
 In our city the moon never ceases,
 But mingles both menses and dew.

With midrow and drosses,
In boots of a lunge! down

In our city the man never backle,
Their laughter fills bed-room and park,
As women gently suckle
Mama-dads in the dark.

The music of the song continues for a while
Kak stands crooked by his bed
happily, father He shows He stands on
the bed. Pause

He takes off his office coat, his shoes,
and trousers. He folds the clothes neatly.
Pause. He stands in his underwear
underclothes. He climbs into bed. Pause.
Kak: The only thing to do (He turns
off the light) I feel so hot (He throws off some
underclothes) It's an Indian summer. The
first in decades. (Pause.)

(Shows) Turn off the radiator!
There is no radiator. He warms in bed.
Pause. He pulls down the blind, Mother, then
can't see anything. My bed feels full of
steam and green slugs. Thank you...

That's better. How do you like my
outfit? A large Panama hat, white
trousers, and shoulderless shirt. I dressed
to kill. Never missed a day's work in
my whole life. Here's to you, comrades.

A wonderful party champagne and
speeches. Too kind. Still all
good things must come to an end. Cool
is on, oh Mother! Ben not, man down
his hat. (Pause. He suddenly lifts his
head.)

I heard a noise. (Pause) A thief! He's
wearing my overcoat. Stop, thief! (He gets
out of bed.) Give me that back. Come on
(Pause.) As if you need a coat in this
weather. He ha (Pause) Gone. (He gets
furiously back into bed. Pause. He turns.)
He's under the bed! Help! Thief! (Screams
long and loud.) Help!

Pause. Silence. The Landlady enters.
Landlady: What the hell is wrong with
you?

Kak (screaming): There's a thief under my
bed. At least one. Probably seven.
She looks under the bed.

Landlady: Nothing.

Kak: They got away!

Landlady: I'm afraid so. (She feels her
pocket.)

Kak: Thank you, Mother.

Landlady: I'll call a doctor.

Pause.

Kak: What did he say?

Landlady: That I should order a pine
coffin. You're too good for oak.

Kak: The wood treatment.

Landlady (squeaking a wet rag to his
forehead): Plus a cold poultice.

Kak: Ahhh. Ahhh.

Landlady: Better?

Kak: I feel a good man. (Pause.) There's
no much kindness in the world. (Pause.)
As cool as a cucumber.

Landlady: The doctor thought he should
make some sort of gesture.

Kak: I shall pay him handsomely next
week. Now that I've come into a lot of
money. Congratulations on my promo-
tion, Mother.

Landlady: Congratulations, Kak.

Kak: I shall be able to boast fifteen

overcoats. (Pause. He shudders.) I shall be
a happy man. Possessions. (Pause. He
sighs.) He has. Pause.)

The Landlady calls for a while. Pause. She
searches the pockets of his coat and
trousers. Pause. She shrugs her shoulders.
Pause. She enters him on the lips. Pause.

PAUPER'S SONG

When I die
Bury me in a box
Of weeping willow,
And let me lie
In a field of plums
With dandelion for my pillow.

When I die
Bury me on a day
Of rain and showers,
And let me lie
In a field of hay
As companion for the ploughmen.

When I die
Bury me in a suit
Of silk and cravats,
And let me lie
In a field of fruit,
A banquet for the vermin.

The important person sits at the desk
looking at some letters. His expensive
overcoat hangs nearby on a hook. After a
while he sighs.

A man's day is never done. (Pause.)
(Amusedly.) Neither is a woman's.
(Pause.) Ah, the impudence! He consults
the notes. (Pause.)

(Sighs.) I contend with Byron. (Pause.)
Tonight, for example, I have no desire
whatsoever to go home to my wife, whom I
love dearly. She will weep. Large moustache
starts. Too bad. Instead, I shall dine in the
company of men, engage in substantial
conversations, and afterwards attack the
flask. (He stands.) Expend a few
hundred on Heber.

He goes to the coat, removes a jacket,
extracts a cigarette and lighter. He
stands smoking and musing, with his
back to the coat.

It disappears up into the ceiling. He
goes to replace the jacket and finds the
coat gone. He groans. He checks the floor,
under his desk. Growing panic. He looks
around, frightened.

Shit and fog start to roll into the area.

I.P. (Help)

My money is unaccounted for.

I.P. (Help) Police!

Pause. The Policeman appears on the fog
nozzles.



Thank God you're come, Sergeant.

Pol: Constable.

I.P. I suppose you like. I'd like to report
a pillowcase.

Pol: (looking out a pad and pencil) Could you
describe the pillowcase article?

I.P. An overcoat. Worth five thousand.

Pol: (taking statement) Please?

I.P. It just disappeared over the air.
There are mounds. Done the next.

Pol: I shall access the recorders, sir.

I.P. Probably some slight theft.

Pol: (muttering) Sorry, sir.

I.P. (sighs) I will sign the bastard slave!

Pol: I'd suggest the Chinese rushed. The
death of a thousand rats. More subtle.

They rush down and stop one another on
the back. Kak appears in the fog. He is
completely naked with pulled-out cheeks.
He holds a pen in one hand and a blank
piece of paper in the other. They run him.
Terror.

Pause. Kak opens his mouth, and black
ink shoots over his lower lip and down his
neck and chest. They scream, and stick to
their knees.

I.P. I didn't mean it!

Pol: It's the God of the Bog.

I.P. Regulations?

Pol: Forget me!

I.P. Maria.

Pol: I shall treat every case seriously in
the future.

I.P. I'm going straight home to my wife.

Pol: I did search the area.

I.P. (producing his wallet) Would you like
some money?

Pol: A new coat?

I.P. A holiday in the Azores?

Kak looks into the man's

I.P. and Pol. (together) Don't go!

Kak disappears. Pause.

The Man appears in Kak's overcoat
through the man's shadow his huge red feet
at them. Then disappears.

The important person's overcoat
descends from above and flaps back wards
and forwards.

They scream, grovel and whimper.

A slow fall to Blackout. Pause. Silence.
A green light comes up on Gogol in the
fog.

SONG OF GOGOL

The world is not quite what it seems,
Rich and the warden of love and peace
Wrings a universe of screams,
Where corpses dance on barren grass.

The world is not quite what it seems,
Behind the clock of day and night
Queers the transcendence of dreams,
Where ice and moon melt no light.

The world does not quite meet its needs,
Behind the banish of food and drink
Ogives a cannibal in tweeds,
Who belches mustard gas and smoke.

The world does not quite meet its needs,
Behind the warmth of coats and words
Shivers a constellation of words,
Where speeches compile with ghosts.
Faster to blacken! Loud metaphors from
the maximum. Silence.

South Australian Theatre Company

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The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin

"Even the ever-straight public servants of Canberra got the play's message . . ."

The Elocution of Benjamin Franklin by David Spenser. Canberra Playhouse, Canberra. Opened 13 Month (Premiered at Perth) 25 August 1976. Director: Richard Wharmston. Designer: Larry Eastwood. Robert O'Brien, Gordon Chater.

After the opening at the Nimrod, I remember some of us saying that the message of the play, social oppression of an individual on such a grotesque scale, lacked plausibility in today's Sydney.

Now, one week before the Canberra opening, the city's anti-race shop was raided by the ACT police for handing snapshots and magazines picturing under-age people in lewd poses. Had there been an adult involved, had that adult been cheating Swiss checks with designers, and had one of his other people been related to Mr Siskie or Mr Findcott (as Moore is in the play), the nation's capital might very well have had its own of Robert O'Brien. In Fraser's capital it's the law of the living-room that rules, with Gaze and Harriet as sheriff.

Juvenile sex is society's new whipping-boy, the same society that placed the hell out of youth in the first place. (This is precisely the theme of one of Queen-Isabella's novels, *Paragraphics*.) It is hypocrisy that I believe Spenser is aiming at in this play, the hypocrisy of a society that lives on drugs yet feels compelled to oppose young people for the crime of choosing their own brand. The remedy is in the play — the wonderful emotional concussions of Double Day meet — is there to underscore the tragedy of the last scene.

Spenser, as a playwright, is a grand talent such like John Romond — a political playwright whose work is scented with tough laughs, sendinels, and hyperbolic flights of language that entertain and drive the message home at the same time. Richard Wharmston is a director of caricatures who often seeks to enrich the compassion of a character. He has done it here so very well. It is the compassion he infuses into Robert O'Brien which helps us identify with the man and his torment. Even the ever-straight public servants of Canberra, at the first night, got the play's message through identifications while they nervously laughed at every bit of outrageous character.

The acting, needless to say, is quite fantastic. It's hard to imagine the part being done by anyone else now, but this was the

cast with Peter Cummins's Mark O'Neill and it no doubt will be with Peter Carroll's Brother. Still, there's so much self-humour about Gordon Chater doing the part. This reinforces the feeling in the first part that, maybe, it is all a harmless game. Then, when he is in bed imagining himself in straits, he becomes all the more moving.

Larry Eastwood is certainly one of our finest designers. This act is terrific in every way. Eastwood's atmospheric acts never have that staged-on-the-stage realism of naturalistic Old Time sets. And his most obvious work always has purpose, it doesn't just fill the space with futuristic progress. I'm glad the programme's Patricia Eastwood together with the actor, playwright, and director. We have so few

good scenographers and we should treat them, as Nimrod always does, importantly.

There's no reason why this national tour won't work. The production was wisely designed for the proscenium stage. And if the message turns out to be too heavy-handed for today's Sydney, as some have said, the provincial centres, where, as Spenser says, Father-Knows-Best and Leave-a-to-beaver in the law, will have a long way to go. I have my doubts about the viability of a tour to Japan, however, which seems to be planned. Too much of this play's theatricality derives from words and characters created through words (it couldn't be done any other way, obviously). The Nimrod might consider smothering *Young Mr. England*. The Japanese have a long roadshow tradition. I am chafed at at least three comedians there who were more like Ray Kinsie than he himself would have cared to admit.



Lust for Power or Perils at Parramatta

"They left their Oz inhibitions at the door and booed, hissed, cheered . . ."



Lust for Power or Perils at Parramatta, written and directed by Michael Boddy. Music: Hill Theatre Resources, Neutral Bay, NSW. Opened 12 March. Musical arrangements and original music by Iain Harris. Photography: Michael O'Reilly.

Costs: Patricia Swithe, John Allen, Teresa Wilson, Gill Miller, Sarah Partridge, Anne Swaffey, Harry Macmillan, John Hamilton, Jordan Olive Marshall, Marianne, Sandra Perle, Hannah Stewart, Alan Harris, Peter, Ron Blanchard, Jessica, Joe Miller, Corrie, Alexander Pope, Sybil, Dale Grant, Mally, Wendy Spenneth, Polly, Carol Adams.

The Music Hall, Sydney's original theatre restaurant, has rediscovered Australia and it's a lot of all right, mates. *Fair Dinkum*. The new show *Lust for Power or Perils* at Parramatta goes back tongue-in-cheek, to the raucy old early colonial days of Governor Macquarie. And it makes a refreshing change from spectacles considering macabre and features by gas-light in London, W1, England.

Whatever pre-natal trauma music host Miller may have gone through behind the plush and opulent when he found himself with a March deadline and the

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sudden loss of his playwright-director Stanley Walsh (back on the boards at the Old Tote and Ensemble), has comically lovable villain Alfred Sander (Young Donning on Channel 9), and his imaginative designer Tom Lugewood (tearing with the Australian Opera) — all mainstays of his last few hits — may have been happily exorcised by curtain-rise George Miller Esquire, can sit back, treat the truly uncoasting whippersnappers and look forward to another long run. For *Lust* is lovely.

Michael Boddy, of the legendary King O'Malley and other storms, has both written and directed this latest opus with great gusto. It's an irrepressible blend of fun and fixate peppered with much theatrical expertise. The melodies may have had a more triumph — like so many of our departed forebears — but Boddy has retained the formula. It's goodness versus boddies again and virtue always triumphant. Only a fool or a special kind of genius would attempt to tamper with an automatically tested a tradition as that, when the family time goes back to medieval music plays and beyond. All Boddy allows himself is one witty twist on the folk-songs-thus-there. And a comic overkill.

The time round, the leaning black-moustached villain is Alan Harvey alias Heinrich Sarwert, "a rotter of a squatter" with designs on the reins of the colony and — you've guessed it — the governor's young, business and, of course, wealthy niece Teresa Wilmet. No doubt any slight resemblance to the ego-tipping founding fathers, such as John Macmillan, is partly and cheaply coincidental. But it would take more than Sarwert to pull the wool over our discerning eyes!

Teresa, naturally, falls for our hero, Henry Macmillan (personable John Hamilton), an amnesiac or — check, honest — freed convict. So Sarwert plots to set him up. It's all abetted by John Allen's Colene Fortunes-Smythe, the inevitable silly-on any type, with Clive Marshall and Ron Blanchard adding to colorful confusion.

But the night really belongs to pretty blonde Anne Sander's exuberant lady's companion, Sarah Partridge, whose many splendid attributes include boots with spurs (aimed towards peeping sight out of her straggling low-cut bodice without ever quite managing to make it, an admirable achievement in losing her skirt in a crisis and a fine hint to ultra-high-tech. Her covering sense of humor couldn't be bettered this side of Greenwich and she has refined the game of ironic self-deception down to a truly snazzy art. Gail Miller's Teresa Wilmet is also rife among whopping bursters in adding spice and spark to the obligatory sugar-coating.

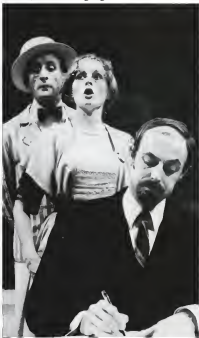
Once again musical director Don Harris has composed all the original numbers, which include at least one rollicking show-stopper. And he uses, like some ancient ancient organist, from the bowels of the theatre on to the stage and back down under again while sedulously playing the piano. Douglas Smith's leading costumes and sets are more conventional than Lugewood's, but very effective for all that, while choreographer Michael O'Reilly's lively gags have an authentic touch of literacy about them.

And once more the weekend warts were not in force and the packed audience loved every minute of it. They left their Oz inhibitions at the door, let down their hair, and replace with raucous food and drink, booed, booed, cheered, sang along and cheered the actors with much good-humored if unadmitted adoration. The dirty grin could indeed have been contagious any day. And maybe the secret weapon of all good Music Hall is just this kind of pot-boiler thrills, better by far than a trip to the psychiatrist. And surely much more fun.



Travesties

"As a play, it is pure champagne for the intellect, and as a production, a barely flawed, exhilarating night out"



Travesties by Tom Stoppard. Mural Theatre, Sydney. Opened 11 March (First performed at Festival 31 January 1976) (Sydney), Ken Harker, designer, Kim Casperson, choreographer, Christine Keane, musical director Robert Mapple, Henry Lane, John Gielgud, Tristan Tzara, Ralph Cosentino, Gwenetha Pym, James Joyce, Matthew O'Sullivan, Cindy Carroll, Barbara Stephens, Lorna, Barry Otto, Noddy, Valerie D'Arcy, Russell, Robert Durr.

Although Tom Stoppard's *Travesties*, an uproarious fantasia about the collapse of Lenin, James Joyce, Tristan Tzara and Henry Carr of the British Consulate in the spy-thrugged Zurich of 1917, is probably the cleverest comedy of ideas in the English language since *Mao and Superman*, it is not a wholly original conception. At the age of 83, George Bernard Shaw, in *In Good King Charles's Golden Days*, did much the same thing, which was to presuppose (or postassuppose) a meeting in an English country house in the summer of 1880, of Isaac Newton, the discoverer of gravity, George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, Godfrey Kneller, the precursor of Hogarth, the Merry Menarch himself, and Nell Gwynne, and to set them chatting away like the staid *Shawes* among machines.

It's wrong, I know, to carp about the levelled and most intellectually interesting night in Sydney theatre in years, but it is fair to say, I think, that Shaw did it rather better, in that he had all five of his characters answering each other back, whereas Stoppard's Isaac Lenin straddled on a soaring monologue about the place of the artist in the new world order and pokes him off to the Finland Station with duty a waddling raspberry to rattle his gleamy orbitide. Perhaps the author, a Czech by birth and something of a *Dukoborsian* humanist, I would hazard a guess, by philosophical predilection, was emotionally unable to put himself in the shoes of the fatherly of his country's rain and argue on his side. Or was the Lenin scenes part of the 90 minutes excised from the play on the night of the dress rehearsal? I'd really love, at any rate, to read the cutting-room floor like the fourth act of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (in which the love of Chevalier and Prism is much expanded), it should be a comic treasure.

That being said, all else is praise. Stoppard's ideas were never very original anyway. *Reasoners* and *Guidelines*, as an idea, has been a feature of every other serious recent Irish time immemorial.

L to R: John Gielgud as Henry Carr, Barbara Stephens as Cindy, Barry Otto as Lenin.

and so, as an idea, was *The Real Importance of Money*, in which the critics appear on the stage and give their comments as the play unfolds. What was original was the intellectual game with which Stoppard works the ideas out. Joyce enters in a whirlwind of innuendoes, offers Carr the role of Alibi in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, ponderously outdoes Taura (in the manner of the great big intellectual wiles in *Liarer*) on the origins of the Dadaist movement and puts dreamily walking with his book. In great Edwardian cadences Carr recounts the great days in the trenches, while the mood raised two parts of trousers, and finally posits the safety of sleeping Switzerland in spite of the crowds of spies and counterespies that make it impossible to get a seat at the best restaurants, and grants the news of a social revolution in Russia with the words, "A social revolution? Unaccompanied women smoking in the streets, that sort of thing?"

Carr, a natural historical figure (his wit outstayed Stoppard by turning up alive and asked on opening night), is one of the more brilliant creations of 20th-century theatre. Seen simultaneously as an old and buckering professor with a laddled memory, a Wisdom dandy, a *Walden*-man (and, a *Pyotrushka* self-doubter and a *Shavian* conceiver, whose actions and opinions, wedged into the plot and a good deal of the dialogue of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (the handbags containing Joyce's and Lenin's manuscripts get mixed up, Carr, in *quid* monies, pretends he is Jack Taura's wicked younger brother, Tristan, and is not), he somehow sums up all the experiences of the 19th century and all the disappointments of the 20th, and he is, among other things, a first-rate role for a first-rate actor, which luckily he gets. John Gaden is charming, a wily, articulate buffoon working in the arms of play for the previous hours of anonymity. As Bennett, the champagne-sipping, Marx-quoting Jewess, John Bann is a perfect model of expressionist emergency, as Swendolen and Cecily, Joyce's and Lenin's lady assistants, Fay Kellon and Barbara Stephens manage the difficult mixture of (jocundous) haughty and sexual repugnance with lady-like multifarious, and Matthew O'Sullivan as Joyce gets into his boy-brain catches a comical, despairing lurch that is a joy to bear. The other, more repellent roles of Lenin and his wife and the hampster Taura Taura were less than perfectly beset by Barry O'Connell, Martin O'Aray and Ralph Costello. Larry Eastwood's set is perfect and Kim Harber's direction without fault.

The play has much to tell us of the banking, vain and sorrowful, after-life, the dull and earnest nature of the true political here, the kindergarten frivolity of the artistic universe, the meaning of courage, the meaning of an (acute) idealism and the nature of memory, and never have we been told such things so punily. As a play, it is pure champagne for the intellect, and as a production, a barely flowed, exhilarating, irreducible night out.

The Pleasure of his Company

"This drawing-room comedy has lost little of its appeal . . ."

The Pleasure of his Company by Samuel Taylor with Cornelia Ott Skinner. Theatre Royal, Sydney. Opened March 14. Director, David Langton, recreating the original London production by Peter Dink. Director, Terry Parsons, lighting, York Cohen. Backdrops, Paula Douglas. Furniture, Ian MacKenzie. Stage, Stanley Hollings, Jim Dougherty. David Langton, Katherine Dougherty, Carol Kane, Jessica Paula, Christine Vane, Roger Henderson, Vince Martin, Fay, David Golder.

There is still a lot of enjoyable entertainment to be found in boulevard theatre and the well-made play with a recognizable beginning, middle and end. It is, however, a fading genre and one has to go back a few years for the better examples, such as *The Pleasure of his Company*, by Samuel Taylor with Cornelia Ott Skinner.

Gave a limited season of 22 performances at Sydney's new Theatre Royal, this drawing-room comedy set in the San Francisco of 1938 has lost little of an appeal since we first saw it at the old Royal back in October 1980. In part this can be attributed to the general excellence of a thing called headed by three interesting overseas stars in Douglas Fairbanks Jr, Stanley Hollings and David Langton.

Once again we have the sort of aristocratic production by Paul Elliott and Bernard Jay for Paul Elliott (Australian) Pty Ltd, by arrangement with the MLC Credit Management in association with The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust and Playbill (Australia) Pty Ltd.

What we saw was a re-staging by David Langton of last year's original London revival directed by Peter Dink. For this Fairbanks came out of retirement of a sort to repeat a role he has played many times in many places. Indeed, it has been stated that the role was written for him and this may well be so, although it appears to be some conflict with a claim in the 1980 programme that the lead characters were created on Broadway by the two who created them so brilliantly here, Australian Cyril Maude and Miss Skinner.

Her contribution to authorship was merely the dialogue, and as an actress herself, she has written lines that are eminently quotable.

Fairbanks, at 66, retains all the light grace and debonair appearance that marked his long career as film. He gives an easy, relaxed reading of the part of "Pope" Poole, the wealthy wanderer who returns

unexpectedly after 15 years in the home of his former wife, Katherine, to attend the wedding of their daughter, Jessica, to a young Texas cowboy.

There is, however, not much depth to colour in his characterisation. His voice is light and he does not project strongly enough. There is a superficiality to the charm — "combsomong coyote", and experienced theatregoer called it — which he is called upon to exert in his selfish but successful campaign to persuade Jessica to defer marriage for a year and to go back in a contrivance of his self-indulgent *figgy-style* postmodernism.

"Pope" is of course, a type that rarely, if ever, existed outside a fantasist's imagination and it calls for a special skill to flesh the character with its leading roles. Fairbanks undoubtedly exhibited this quality, but it was little in evidence here.

Jessica is most understandingly and appealingly played by Christine Anest. She once makes credible her naive assertion that her decision to go to follow her father is motivated by a loyal desire to adjust him a measure of the companionship he missed by not being a part of her growing-up.

However, the one whose company gives greatest pleasure is that fine actor and wily old comic Stanley Hollings — now 84, according to the public press. It is a joy to watch him take command of any scene at will. He has certainly only to greet a couple of words to be in control.

It is also undoubtedly a pleasure for a great many to meet in the flesh the actor who rendered himself to tens of thousands of Australian audiences in the county and apartment Land Ballany of *By Your Leave*, *David Langton*. As Jessica's stepfather he has little chance to shine, but the polish and expertise enough as he takes advantage of every opportunity offered.

As the girl's mother, still attracted to her former husband, Carol Kane once again gives a beautifully rounded portrayal, every line, every expression, every gesture a telling contribution.

Vince Martin is regally convincing as Jessica's discomfited Papa, and managed by his concern for his own bail, and vulnerable David Golder seems in a cameo role as Fay, the Japanese servant.

The elegant setting, designed by Terry Parsons, was imported from London together with the sets.

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*You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown***"Nicholas Papademetriou's Red Baron act brought the house down . . ."**

Four in a Good Man: Charlie Brown Book comic and lyrics by Clark Gessner. Independent Theatre. Sydney. Opened 11 March. Director: Hugo Mauro (musical director, Lisa-ann Partridge (vocals), Lindsay Partridge (percussion), Jeff Edwards (drums), Gary Newman). Charlie Brown: Hugo Mauro. Lucy: Lydia White. Linus: Robert White. Snoopy: Nicholas Papademetriou. Piggy: Wendy Tang. Schroeder: Tony Carter.

You're a Good Man: Charlie Brown is an old show in search of a new audience. Originally a Broadway musical for adults (generously presented unsuccessfully in Sydney as such), it is now being offered to the Saturday matinee audience.

This venture is based on the wide appeal of the Peanuts comic strips, which form the foundation of the work. But there are difficulties, some inherent in the nature of the show and some due to the current presentation.

If one were to start from scratch to make a musical specifically for Australian children from the Peanuts series, the natural would be chosen and slanted differently. The form is that of a comic, with the items recognisably shaped by the short comic strip, and while this is not in

itself inevitable, the first half contains too many overextended and not very amusing short pieces, some of which went over the heads of the young audience. This is partly the fault of the production. A broken pace and more attention to dialogue and projection would help.

The other main problem is that of adults impersonating children, particularly children whose "real" faces and characters are so firmly impressed on our minds because of their origin. Hugo Mauro had a notable experience of innocence and demotivation (alternating with hopefulness), even if he didn't really look like Charlie Brown, but in general the director cast and shaped of the cast didn't correspond too well to the ideal models.

The great exception was the Snoopy of Nicholas Papademetriou. There was no attempt at dog costume or doggy behaviour, but he was more authentic than any of the humans. His posture of face and shoulders, eloquence of gesture, like and energetic of movement, he communicated the quintessential Snoopy. He was not a man playing a dog, but a dog playing at being a person (while at the same time retain-

ing his right to be a dog commenting on the human situation). Of all the Peanuts characters Snoopy is the chief cult figure for the very young and they were lucky to have him so well portrayed. His Red Baron act brought the house down and the show is worth seeing for his performance alone.

In the original comic strips the most outstanding of the children is Lucy, bossy, infuriating and always right. You love her or you hate her, but you have to engage her. This gives her a well-defined personality which is less difficult to put across than the others, and she was well served by Cicely Shute. To judge from cries of approval from the audience, lots of small girls find it easy to identify with the infuriated Lucy and my small daughter went so far as to praise her over to Snoopy.

Apart from Snoopy's appearances, the best scenes were some of the group numbers, particularly the quartet of "book reports" in *Prize Rabbit* and the "Glee Club rehearsal" interwoven with book-keeping. These helped to make the second half much livelier than the first.

The Independent Theatre is hoping that the wide appeal of the Peanuts series will bring in the teenage audience, but I'm not sure whether they attend Saturday matinees at the theatre these days. Which is a pity.



What the Butler Saw

"How sad it was to find the play reduced to the level of undies and innuendo . . ."

What the Butler Saw by Joe Orton. Hunter Valley Theatre Company, Hunter Theatre, Newcastle Theatre, Theatre Centre, Glasgow, Perth.

Dr Premee: Alan Becker. Gwendolyn Barclay. Denise Osa. Mrs. Prunella. Pat Bishop. Nicholas Buckart. Chris Oswald. Dr. Bates. Ned Redden. Margaret Marsh. Tom Cradock.

Joe Orton met his death aged 34 at the hands of his jealous male lover. The killer then committed suicide. The circumstances made for good press, just as his earlier unapologetic painting of nude photographs into library books had put his name before the public eye — and earned him a somewhat grim as yet ill-fated, and, ironically, in his murderer's death, as with Pausanias later, he stood for honesty and liberalism in sexual relationships. The brief span of his creative period, four years, saw the piece first thrown down, in all his work, to the restrictions of censorious morality. But if it challenges it does so by creating a different realm which in the world of plays becomes consistent and acceptable, if camp. Mr Shaw's pay cheque-free killer and sexual athletes, as so paginated into a formalist message a trait by the apparently lecherous Lindley and her brother. In *What the Butler Saw* every possible coupling of Homo Sapiens, including incest, is licensed in a Freudian ambience of libido analysis. In Lord Hall a 16-year-old, thinks nothing of dumping the next night's remains of his mother in favour of protecting the cache of stolen money, the progression is funny, striking as sacred cows has exposed the emotional rather than rational ground on which they stand.

Yet human is the paradox of Orton. Despite his historical place in the sewer-ware theatre of anger and repulse, he committed the crime of commercial success, as did Frank Marz, with whom he bears companionship, in the same act. There was the comprehensibility of using sexual as titbits just one step ahead of the public debate (and several ahead of practice) in the way Benjamin Franklin does now, but then only just released from the censorious grip of the Lord Chamberlain, there was the use of the false mode, though often turned against itself, and the variety of the plays in its theme. They did crackling and grounded in everyday speech, which had just won the battle against attempts to re-politise the theatre, and the traditional

mode, by and large of stage setting — all these ingredients made up the light, and often heavy, brew that intoxicated the West End. And grand spaces of the English stage like Noel Coward could beam down their approval of the homosexual content as openly stated by their youthful new chore poet.

Despite a recent season at Orton at the Royal Court in London (1993), his name is still far from prominent amongst the new wave. They had their commercial success too, *Look Back in Anger*, *The Caretaker* and so on, but in a sense this was accidental and incidental to what originally motivated the writing. Where they seemed gossamer and spins of plot, Orton, in the false mode, crumpled his plays with humour and incident, where they explored new techniques, he stuck with the old ways — though undoubtedly he looked there along in the prisons.

Commercial production was both the making, in the short term, and the breaking, in the medium respect, of a natural talent. The plays could be produced as Brian Rix with a touch of Molièreque success, if they touched on vital issues of ethical concern, all could be made palatable with the excuse of camp irreverence. In the longer term, Orton must be reassessed, and one can sense the beginnings of a revolution in, for example, the writings of John Lahr. Though his practices have mainly been treated as somewhat stage pieces for the utilitarian of the carriage track, they can be seen as acts of subversion with as shattering an impact on the crowds as a grenade tossed into a hotel lobby.

For his world is less kitchen-sink than Osborne, his message more sociologically prescient than Pinter. His wings of sexual liberalism but knows that beyond a certain point freedom becomes anarchy. If he was the naive technique of force, it is because of his in-built ability to go beyond the acceptable to a domain where disorder reigns and from where order can be fundamentally questioned. Representations of society are crooks (Laur) or fools (What the Butler Saw), sexual authority is misapplied (Mr Shaw) or lampooned (So Winton Churchill's process is related to penis size, not intellect). The sacred is desecrated and the devout made the grin.

How and it was, then, to find *What the Butler Saw* reduced to the peck-a-bow level of undies and innuendo, so be back on the

smooth carpet of middle-class appeal rather than treading the broken glass of the true spirit of his plays. Deeper issues were relegated to the programme notes and then only in reference to the old sanity/madness syndrome (an issue as gripping as therapy's teeth a decade ago when Laing and Co. first looked at the roots of psychiatric practice). The effect of prison upon him as "galvanising (his) anger" (after John Lahr) was duly noted, but allowed no room on stage where caricature robbed character of any such force.

Alan Becker set the tone in the triggering note of attempted seduction in the psychomaniac Premee. His prying fingers behind the secretary's back had the psychosexual two-dimensionality which marked the production as a whole. Dr Bates, the government commissioner come to inspect the asylum, is written as a disturbing creation, perverting the course of enlightenment by jumping to the most perverse conclusions about the situations he finds in Ned Redden's characteristics he became too obviously just a mechanism by which confusion was heaped on confusion rather than embodying the most anxious of Freudian theory. Excessive, which, coupled with the bungling attempts by Premee to conceal his lecherous advances, led to the coupling of the ingenuous secretary's hair and her verification as insane in the belief that she is a victim of premature rage (and only as it turns out almost true). And when the cruelty is taken too far, one is forced into a highly ambivalent view of the "body".

In traditional farce misadvent there is the merry-go-round of clothes-swapping and the role reversal which it entails. The bellboy, who has pornographic photos of Premee's wife to blackmail the couple for payment, and a secure job, loses his trousers in an attempt to reveal police. Mrs Prunella has lost her dress back in the hotel and the secretary and policeman lose their clothes on the pretext of medical examinations. Even on this level the production was hard put to bring off the trifling transformations from which the play derives its title.

Of the cast, Pat Bishop as the sexually unstable and near-alcoholic Mrs Prunella ("They'll send you to the grave in a 'f-shuffled coffin'") must take the first night home alone. Her agonised handling of lust for the young bellboy, doubts for her husband's sanity, befuddlement with drink and eventual fear for her own mind when faced by near-madness and sexual rage, held the pulse of the production and

draw (ing into the walls) playing out of focus of the play when much around was sustained and all-paced. It was only when the almost hopeless arrangements reached their peak — with the policeman wounded and wearing a leather-tie dress, the bellboy in his underwear and also wounded, the secretary crowded and in a strait-jacket, and the two psychiatrists trying to certify each other at gunpoint — that the

extent of Orson's mastery of force became apparent and covered all before it. In the trap of the consulting-room, now closed off by bars, the radical resolution is disclosed. Again the thrustness of the last which separates representing from theatre of crassly is fully apparent.

As the bleeding bellboy ditches on to his new-found mother and the hastily

descent policeman clatters through the roof to claim the last piece of Sgt. Winton. Ramon advises, "Let us put on our clothes and leave the world" but the wrings had been as far too long for this last to have the impact intended. The darker side of Orson's disturbed and disturbing games, and thus the tremendous power of his comic vision maintained a potential for others to realize.

Rex Cramphorn

Lunchtime Playhouse/Resurgents

Next Brylcreme and Maggot Pies

"My reaction was . . . one of admiration for the motives of those involved"

Next by Terence McNally, Lunchtime Playhouse, St. James Playhouse, Sydney, Opened February 28. Directed: Peter Williams. With Carmen Duncan and Gordon Glenwright. *Brylcreme and Maggot Pies* by Bob Golding, Resurgents, Parramatta Jail, NSW. Directed: Tony Ralph. With: Neil Carroll, Soupy, Laurie Rylance, Patrick, Jimmy Bryant. Actors: Don Duffell.

What can you say about theatrical activities which serve a social purpose, reach an audience to whom other kinds of theatre are largely unavailable, and provide practical therapy for those involved? Only that it's good to know that theatre can be of some use. The two short plays of which I write here take in common, perhaps, apart from my reaction to them which, in both cases, was one of admiration for the motives of those involved.

Next, presented by Lunchtime Playhouse at St. James Playhouse, was directed by Peter Williams. Now that the AMP Theatre is no longer a viable proposition for Q Theatre and that time-honoured lunch-dance tradition has moved on to a new phase of activity — nights in Sydney's western suburbs — Lunchtime Playhouse seems to have taken up where Q left off. An expansion to "help keep top theatre alive in the lunch-hour" in the programme should not confuse us as to the real value of this particular theatrical form, which is the continued artistic survival of the elderly ladies who formed the backbone of Q's support for all those years and who have, to judge by the audience with whom I saw *Next*, effectively transferred their allegiance to Lunchtime Playhouse.

As at Q, I found myself touched by the unobtrusive of this neglected and underprivileged audience for the social and cultural occasions provided by a sandwich

or two and a short play. *Next* is a fairly conventional two-hander about the call-up medical examination of a middle-aged theatre manager by a female army doctor. The man finds the experience humiliating and the playlet ends with his monologue of self-reassurance which builds to the point of his waggling the doctor's sole (she has conventionally left the room). The play's tiny message — of the "I am an individual, I am of value" type — and the humour in which it is couched, are fairly familiar. The actors, Carmen Duncan and Gordon Glenwright, look slightly larger than life-size in the little, high, heaven-bell, proscenium-arch space in which lunchtime theatre occurs inevitably to take place.

When the military band music which had been playing for quite a long time at low level and had built up to a peak for the opening of the curtain, finally stopped for Miss Duncan to begin the play with a shortening "Next", the old lady beside me said, "Thank goodness for that." For an audience to whom band music is a little noisy and Gordon Glenwright's knees immensely rogue, *Next* is a valued social security and my own reaction to it not a little welcome.

This feeling was intensified at Parramatta Jail where, with a rented audience, I saw the second performance of *Brylcreme and Maggot Pies*, written by Bob Golding and performed by prisoners. The play was directed by Tony Ralph for Resurgents — a theatre group in Parramatta Jail, which originally produced Jim McNeill's work. The play is about getting out of prison at the end of a sentence and coming back for a new one, having failed to adjust to life "outside".

The various circles of hatred prison and being unfitted by it for any other life is convincingly presented while the "squareheads'" logic of crime and

punishment is conspicuously absent. (Since all the prison plays I have seen to me thus in common, I conclude it is true of prison society in general.) In fact, prison is presented as a grim alternative life-style like drugs — an alternative which quickly cuts up any other way of living.

The nature of humour, roughness, and cautions contained in *Brylcreme* and *Maggot Pies* is as frank as its content as *Next*'s style and content are in its American one. But when the performers are speaking language and communicating thoughts which are entirely personal and relevant to their real everyday lives, the experience for an audience is clearly on other levels than the simply theatrical. This effect was compounded by attendant circumstances — the play was delayed, we heard, while prison officers refused to attempt to have prisoners in the audience with the rather large mixed group. This meant that audience reaction to the topical aspects of some of the dialogue was reduced, changing the tone of the play, I was told by people who had seen the previous performance with a large audience of prisoners, to a marked extent.

I was told that the activities of Resurgents are not viewed favourably by most prison officers, with the exception of the governor. On the way out we were asked if we had copies of a prison magazine called, naturally, *Convicts*, which was not allowed outside the prison in a situation where an actor, after the performance, turned down to hug a woman he had, presumably, seen only through visiting-room glass for some years, the poetic mood of the writing and the performance seemed utterly unsustainable. I hope the presence of a Channel Nine Current Affairs team filming a "segment" for snappy home digestion and cutting on the actors to report "isn't it with some talking about?" for the purpose, will be justified by wider general acceptance of the value of such work in such institutions.

Hobson's Choice

"... a plethora of beautiful costumes, a whimsical story, and a steady flow of smile lines ..."

Hobson's Choice by Harold Brighouse (SGHO Theatre Festival, opened 16 March). Direction, Nancy Kay; designer, Peter Cooke. Alex Hobson, Robin Garney, Vickie Hobson, Louise Reith, Maggie Hobson, Kate Wilson, Albert Rimmer, Kate Lennie, Henry Morris Hobson, Don Crosby, Mrs Hoggins, Hazel Marston, Tubby Widdow, Phil Mays, William Masepp, Douglas Hodge, Jan Riddell, Kenneth Newman, Ada Faggote, Gillian Hyde, Fred Remickell, Warren Hinchman, Dr MacPherson, Ray Cameron.

My critical companion Don Batchelor by chance recently attended one of a number of performances by the Queensland Theatre Company at the end of which the audience was asked to say behind and discuss QTC policy with the actors and directors of the play, and so forth. Perhaps the company chose itself at the ground-zero, as monopoly in Queensland on the current small theatre world is scarce, and it is already looking to new possibilities such as regional youth theatre and perhaps a small experimental company.

The main topic of discussion on this night, however, with the kinds of plays that went onto the main SGHO seasons, and one proposition which the company rather hopefully put was: "Would you like to see a more varied and adventurous programme?" About 30 audience members — and a fairly random sample of middle-class society — had stayed to hear the suggestion, and their response, according to Don, was almost uniformly negative. What they valued about the QTC seasons of plays was their predictability, their wholeness: a good night out where you know what you'd get and you could take the kids. Not like the films no audience, violence, no four-letter words, though someone on the play had said "mistake" and they rather wished a lady's happened.

One sample doesn't make a survey of course, but I'd raised over Don's attention for several days when I happened to walk, once a Saturday morning of *Hobson's Choice*. I went in 30 minutes early and watched the audience as they arrived. The first thing that struck me was the extraordinary number of family groups — mostly mothers with eight- to 18-year-old sons and daughters. There was an old-fashioned warmth there somewhere, reminiscent of family parties. A fleet of minibus continued

on my left, a steadily retired then sat on my right. He told me the QTC, generally turned in a good show. Slowly I became aware of a bubble of security, a cosy enveloping world-like bubble, delicate yet unbroken. Few of these people would go to see any of the kinds of plays I'd consider important. I wondered dazedly if I was in the presence of those to whom the latest item of S. S. would apply.

*I was run over by the truck one day
Ever since the accident I've walked like
this
So stick me legs in plaster
Till I'm free*

It was certainly an audience which wanted to see *Hobson's Choice*, a slight piece of comedy written during the First World War and looking back to the high-Victorian 1880s — an age of affluent middle-class shopkeepers, of relative stability in the world, and of daughters who wanted to get married on their own terms. They'd come to see gentle comedy, and they were rewarded with a plethora of beautiful costumes, a whimsical story, and a steady flow of smile lines.

Taken seriously, the play would be pretty objectionable. It pretends to make a few digs at snobishness and class prejudice, but in essence it reveals the same snobisms for the working-class as the snob's it pretends to be. Hobson, the ageing widower and bootmaker with a liking for a pint, has three daughters who run the shop. The eldest, Maggie, rebels against her father's tyranny, summons the leading boot craftsman, Willie Masepp, up from the workshop below, and summarily tells him she's going to marry him. She tells his seemingly lower-class girlfriend to bugger off and goes. Willie no say in the matter. She has decided to educate him, give him a sense of ambition, dress him up a bit, use his craft ability to set up in opposition to her father, capture the high-class trade, and rise in the world. Which she does, dragging the hapless Willie up into the middle-class and literally into the marriage bed. Her Pigeonhole activities succeed perfectly, and her Willie becomes a cock sure, handsome, successful little prig who successfully manages to take over Hobson's shop. And, in argument over the name of the firm (Masepp and Hobson, not Hobson and Masepp), he scans his first victory over Maggie. In short, both

hero and heroine would be fairly simple, semi-creatures if we took them seriously.

The QTC doesn't, and is transparent in not doing so. Their beautifully directed, designed and acted production lifts us from the opening curtain into the world of make-believe, and gently lowers us again, two and a half hours later with our very bubble again. A slide illuminated the scene during as we entered, a picture showing the cottages and factories of an English industrial town. A blind slide, without a hint of rich and poor or splendour and squalor. And it was the time for the production.

Kate Wilson simply got on breathily with the business of being Maggie and her good-humoured high-handedness helped us to see that all the other characters were mere toys, objects to be pushed around by her and so she should get too concerned about their feelings or their rights. Doug Hodge as Willie was the perfect top, an unassuming puppet, full of the business of uncomprehending innocence. Occasionally, there was an awkward moment where we suddenly wondered if we were supposed to feel sympathy for him, or to believe he might be some vague representation of the English working-class, but by then the moment was gone in another pleasant if predictable pose of propriety.

Don Crosby's Hobson was a slightly less happy creation, far fairly predictable reasons. The father-daughter clash is the only piece of real blood in the work, and to maintain the looking, cream-bun style of the production, the conflict of wills had to be considerably muted. One felt that Hobson had no choice from the opening scene, and his resistance was a token one. And among all the minor characters, who made up a sort of sub-plot, there wasn't one that wasn't predictable to the last sentence.

The QTC has worked hard over the years building audiences by developing an acknowledged house style. And there is one, perhaps, a sort of tacit understanding between company and audience that, whenever the company feels obliged to stretch their wings a little by offering more varied or adventurous fare, the audience will understand and stay away for a while without holding it against them.

And so I came away with Don Batchelor's story, a trivial play, a fine production and the obvious enjoyment of four hundred people to juggle with. Watching them fit us up with smiling faces, I thought again of the lines:

*So stick me legs in plaster,
Till I'm free
Then Marry Me. My bubble floats steadily
on*

The Department

"It says much for the pace of the dialogue and the strength of performances . . . that our interest is never tempted to flag"

The Department by David Williamson, 1st National Theatre Company, Playhouse, Perth. Opened 16 March. Director Anne Pearce, designer Anne French.

Jordan, Leslie Wright, Robby, Geoff Giffin, Sam, Leslie Taylor, Alan, Dennis Miller, Robby, Alan Gaffney, Peter, Ian Nicholas, John, Ian Scott, Al Neville Gaffney, Owen, Ivan King, Myra, Carol Skinner.

Nearly two years later David Williamson's *The Department* has reached the Perth Playhouse. In fact, the delay is of no consequence. Even in 1973 it was already "perished", set back to a golden age (1967) when tertiary education still saw the city as the limit, and campus-building was a game in which you used students' unworldly naivetes as construction, fixed at the family border, who shed back money.

The later perspective layers up the play's more complex layering. It's not merely about the manipulations and group dynamics within one particular engineering department in one particular time, but about the whole tertiary system, and beyond that, about the running of organisations in general. True, the immediate shock of recognition in the education business is the most powerful, but even public schools have been able to apply the patterns to their sections.

The Department occupies a special place among Williamson's works. By restricting herself to the format of the staff meeting, he has imposed rigid limitations on himself, which force him into deeper exploration and more subtle handling of his material. In the larger framework of his other plays, he tries the emotional patterns of family life exploding into domestic violence, or the social comedy of the party scenes, the serious comment is based somewhere beneath the analysis of local colour and easy laughter. Here the laughter is used to sharpen the more solid comment on the specific issues clattering around the theme of mismanagement, through incompetence, cynicism and self-seeking. The magic ingredient of instant Australia is dispensed with, and any sense of communication now results from an acute observation of recognisable people in a wider context.

There is, of course, something shifting about the midst of the piece. We are expected to sympathise with Robby, the head of the department who bullies and exploits his staff (and he's not above talking

talks about one to the other, either), who is willing to sell the present lot of students down the river for the benefit of some future generation, or is it more self-aggrandisement? Who can't manage a calculation which one of his junior staff has been sitting on for 16 months, and who has long since ceased to relate in human terms to anyone because of his all-consuming "love" for his department.

A more appropriate response is probably not sympathy at all, but merely a dispassionate recording of the facts presented — that this kind of survival is the only possible mode of existence in the world shown in the play. When, at the end of it all, Robby stands alone, looking for all the world like a captain on the bridge, it is clear that he has sailed his crew through a stormy passage and will cope again in the future.

But the play is so there, despite the shorn-dynamics looking around the edges. The kind of heat that is being generated, and the equilibrium established is brutally haphazard, and quite successful. The friction is one in terms of temperament, and even the basic symbolism of the shaky foundations is based on human error. Thus, the possible collapse of the building because of the faulty installation of the tank is duplicated in moral terms by the discovery that the college was originally founded on crooked money. Yet it serves us on both levels.

The stresses brought out by the staff meeting repeat the pattern. The structure may buckle a little, but it holds up.

Apart from Robby, and the female intruder from the Humanities, Myra, the characters are just a shade removed from stereotype. Their importance is in interest and demonstration of attitudes, not in depth analysis. Flimsy part among them is Mine, the common-room wit, here played by Dennis Miller with a crisp sense of fun. He has the most dazzling Williamson lines and never loses Leslie Wright, as the maintenance man, Gordon, who is a respondent of persons, and contributes those remarks about those who can do, and those who can't, is spot on, and clearly echoes the comments of large parts of the audience (any audience). Peter, the "thoroughbred among the packhorses" and John, the middle-of-the-road man (Ian Phillips and Ian Scott) present problems in

contrast, the one having to be put in his place, the other mollified and reassured in his fading situation. The other set of contrasts is Robby (Geoff Giffin plays him as an aging schoolboy), whose Robby behaviour is his career misadventure, and Al (Neville Gaffney), whose the system has turned into an absolute neurotic. Between them they demonstrate most of the things a "bad" system can do to its members, and also what kinds of people, added together, create a bad system.

In the character of Robby, head of the department, something more personal is explored. He has gained a department but lost his soul. In the Melbourne production the emphasis had been on exhausted disillusionment. Alan Cassell in the Playhouse version plays him with more fidgety nervous energy, suggesting a man aware of his shaky position, aggressively on the defensive and play-acting for all he's worth. The closer he allows himself to get to anxiety is in the moments alone with Myra, but at the same time he gets up a barrier of restraint against the possibility of intimate contact.

Carol Skinner brings with her the experience of having played Myra in the original production, and evokes as any confidence and robust good sense that is in part the character but also the result of complete familiarity with the role. Her cool argument demonstrates the issues at stake, whilst her passionate commitment to the interests of the students nicely shows up the lack of genuine concern among her colleagues.

Physically, it must be one of the most uncomfortable productions the Playhouse has seen. Although the dialogue suggests the laboratory environment, Anne French's set gives pride of place to a monstrous great piece of machinery which controls the actors to a narrow strip downstage, on a ladder on either side, and they finally herd together in a small area suggesting an overcrowded interior room perched on top of the machine. This ensures that the underlying motivation for entering the department by far means or foul so that it will qualify for better administration, is constantly in view. For the play it means little freedom of movement once they are dislodged and locked into their places, for the audience it involves physical strain (unless they sit in the balcony seats) in focussing upwards for the major part of the action. It says much for the pace of the dialogue and the strength of performances, both individually and in the group, that our interest is never tempted to flag.

At War with Shaw

"Director John Milson's deft touch . . . seems surer with every production"

At War with Shaw. Two one-act plays by G. B. Shaw. *Hole-in-the-Wall* (Theatre, Perth). Opening March 16. Director, John Milson. Designer, Graham Myles.

The Man of Destiny. Napoleon Bonaparte. Robert Van Marckelsberg. Giuseppe Grassop. Rod Williams. Sir Francis Madigan. Maria Jones. The Strange Lady. Tracie Youden. *O'Flaherty P.C.* (Theatre O'Flaherty P.C., Allen. Theatre General). Sir Francis Madigan. Matt, Rod Williams. Mrs. O'Flaherty. Margaret Ford. Terrie Duncall. Tracie Youden.

Treated as the publicity as a post-festival "refresher", the new *Hole-in-the-Wall* double bill of one-act plays lives up to its advertising. Director John Milson's deft touch (which seems to me surer with every production) has transmuted two slight (though typical) examples of Shaw's comic wit into a light, bright and sparkling evening entertainment. Perhaps the beauty of the two plays, *The Man of Destiny* and *O'Flaherty P.C.* works in Milson's favour, for because of it we are marvellously spared the boring and non-stop carefully designed authorial harangues which too frequently mar those plays Shaw himself considered his most substantial.

The rubric covering the two-play presentation, *At War with Shaw* might suggest a dramatic emphasis on thematic links common to both plays. In fact, Milson does not force the anti-war link in his production of the two plays. *The Man of Destiny* (1896) depicts an unimagined moment in the life of the young Napoleon just after his victory in the Battle of Austerlitz, and while Shaw takes an occasional opportunity to mock the pretensions of the warrior, he is much more concerned with depicting (through his fanciful tale of the *Strange Lady* who needs the general's dependence) something of the reality of greatness.

Right through the 1890s and early 1900s GBS had something of a bias in his assumed Irish home (which has not helped by Nietzsche's writings on the Superman) and many of his plays of this period focus on characters whose greatness is a function of their "arrogance" (a quality Shaw never really defines, but which seems to consist of a fusion of realism, intellectual acuity and a determined opposition to overly conventional means of achieving necessary ends. In *The Man of Destiny* Napoleon is both an "arrogant", but he is presented at a time when he stands on the edge of his destiny and is consequently more than usually wary about the pleasures of his own step.



In the Shaw production, Napoleon is played by Robert Van Marckelsberg in keeping with the fantasy of the plot, and the almost mindless out-and-outness of the debate between the Corsican Conqueror and the *Strange Lady*, Tracie Youden for a mannered style of performance. In the context of this style, Van Marckelsberg created a Napoleon whose irony and forcefulness were both thoughtfully contained by a certain formality of manner. As the *Strange Lady*, Tracie Youden was only slightly less effective, there being moments when grace of movement and gesture were lost in straining too hard for just the right composition of body, limbs and head.

The supporting players, Rod Williams and Maria Jones, as the bookkeeper Giuseppe and a witless gentleman officer respectively, do well with their parts. Rod Williams's Giuseppe I thought a particularly fine piece of comic acting, until the performance was marred at the end by the inconsistency of an exaggeratedly fearful over-reaction to the *Strange Lady's* suggestion that witchcraft has been working. Shaw's Giuseppe is pretty much a stock character, but he has been given a share of intelligence and a certain peasant dignity, qualities well portrayed by Williams, but contradicted by his excessive of superstitious fear in the final moments of the play. He played up, for the broad effect, what should have been played down, for the more subtle and living one.

The second offering, *O'Flaherty P.C.*, is an even slighter piece than *The Man of Destiny* written in 1915, and interestingly subtitled *A Revolving Pencil*, a device

an allusion to the life of Private Dennis O'Flaherty, V.C., a simple Irish lad not thinking by his experience in the trenches Shaw took the play to attack British jingoism (represented, in its mild form, by Sir Francis Madigan, the general O'Flaherty is accompanying on a marching tour), and on whose Irish roots his childhood has been spent) and to satirise Anglo-Irish antagonisms, represented through O'Flaherty's stereotypical mother.

O'Flaherty was played by a relative newcomer to the Perth stage (former undergraduate student, Alan Fletcher). He is a young actor of great promise and was convincing as the slightly homesick, slightly later young soldier at odds of warlike, Irish mothers and English generals (but his comeliness becoming a French dancer). Fletcher's control of the characteristically Irish accent was only just short of impeccable, and a couple more nights in the role should test him expert enough to fool St Patrick himself.

An O'Flaherty's mother, Margaret Ford has a plum comic part, and she did it more than justice, to be sure. My terms obnoxious, aggressive, domineering and offensively well-stricken are a delightfully comic image of the old woman, and Margaret Ford made the most of her.

The O'Flaherty P.C. Rod Williams complemented his comic interplay of earlier in the evening with a nicely handled Sir Francis Madigan, upper-class military gent, crusty but essentially good-natured, clocked out in the woods and making boots obligatory for all generals turned to country estates. Tracie Youden also makes a brief appearance, this time as Terrie, performed and former O'Flaherty sweetheart. There is little enough for her to do, but what there is is done well, in keeping with the high standard of performance over all.

Apart from the awareness of performance in both plays, they are also a delight for the open. Contained are an funny (as you wouldn't) good and the set, a slightly raised platform backed by two wheelwashed flat board walls set at an angle is effective both when dressed as an old room (*The Man of Destiny*) or a garden courtyard (*O'Flaherty P.C.*). Presented in a spirit of breezy fun, and with a delightful lack of pretension, these two plays do make an effective refresher for theatre patrons overladen on Festival drama. They have all the sparkle and effectiveness of a glass of An-drews, but, fortunately, no traces of the distasteful after-effects. The *Hole* management has every right to hope for a successful five-week season.

T

Same Time Next Year

"Blundell is . . . at times so emotionally ill-at-ease that both love and accent slip . . ."



Same Time Next Year by Bernard Slade. Phoenix Productions, Her Majesty's Theatre, Adelaide. (Opened 13 March. Director, Gordon Hunt. George, Graeme Blundell; Dora, Nancye Hayes.)

Graeme Blundell, as the adulterous seducer in the new Bernard Slade comedy *Seven Years 'Till Four*, passively declares in his prewed parlance that "Women are more pragmatic than men: they adjust to whatever is before."

The audience was amused. His lover Dora, played by Nancye Hayes, responded with a glaring look of incredulity.

And laughter in tandem with anger resonated through a near-empty Her Majesty's, in Adelaide.

But Blundell's seemingly canny remark, a provocative one in the spirit of sexual democracy, offered an early clue to Slade's version of *Sex*. Dora and George are both model earners of American middle class. And they take on an extra-marital commitment to each other in true consumer style. Their various affair is a case of love by instalment.

For one weekend each year for 24 years, Dora and George meet in a guest cottage in a North Californian country inn, secluded from cars, tax and responsibilities.



by the comforting thought that all's justified because "the Russians have the bomb . . . we could be dead tomorrow."

George comes out from New Jersey yearly to make a friend's boat. He has a perfect wife Dora, an American-born Italian Catholic, leaves husband Harry and the children in Bakersfield for her annual tryst. She has no wife but simply plays truant and feeds spiritual, not to say sexual, uplift in the arms and companionship of the American accountant.

From the outset Dora, more than George, makes flexible her rigid principles in order to cope and "adjust to whatever is better." George suffers pangs of conscience: he answers a phone call from his pre-school daughter in a voice "half hoarse with passion." Or he worries aloud about the "looks of horror in the eyes of the children."

Dora adjusts. And that ability to adjust was her blessing as an individual, developing in stages from pregnant high-school dropout, pregnant high-school graduate in her 20s, sexual adventures, middle-aged college hippet, insubstantial financial whiz and finally to gracious, but always adulterous, grandmother.

Nancye Hayes handles the transitions expertly. But her pace and spark, unfortunately, are often impaired by Blundell's dilapidated performance. He is clearly uncomfortable in his role, and at times so consciously ill-at-ease that both love and accent slip.

Hardly words perhaps, since he is a relatively recent addition to the show, but that is how he is.

And to where. Miss Hayes is equipped with a maturity that leads to more than a superficial understanding and interpretation of her character. Blundell appears somewhat handicapped. Age in theatre must be more than glib flouting and puffed wrinkles.

Gordon Hunt's direction was, one must say, discreet perhaps too discreet, for it was as if the puppet-master had cut the strings, only to allow his characters to flap down in stages.

The set was likewise unimpressive, a kind of trendy bachelor pad rather than the guest house of a country inn, and the taped voices and music used to provide transitions between scenes felt much to be desired.

In short, *Same Time Next Year*, was not a satisfactory night of slick comedy and fair performance. Rather, it seems more appropriate to say that, as a parachute production, it left one constantly hoping someone would pull the curtain's rip cord.

Macbeth

"... setting itself tasks which have provoked challenging and direct responses"

Directed by Eugene Dennis. Union High Adelaide. Opposed by Mirth Dennis, Martin Coleman, George Joe Hughes, Corbin, Geoff Crawford, Maura, Peter Bowen, Rocco, Rob Brockman, Leonardo Sella, Jill Rodden, Odey, John Webb, Lachlan, Sue Baker, Martin, Lew Matthews, Lady in waiting, Megan Brown, Wanda Jane Miller, Isolde, Nick Carrington, David Mathews, Norville, Paula May, Virginia Hughes, Irene Matthews.

Ambrose Bierce's cynical view of ambition as "an overwhelming desire to be killed by someone while lying and made ridiculous by friends when dead" would no doubt meet with the approval of an Ibsenite who purports to show in his *Macbeth* the paradoxical and fatality of man's attempts to outsmart destiny. His *Macbeth* is a set of reactions, a lot of attitudes, most of them — defiance, repugnance, awe — have their source in Shakespeare's hero. But here they are hung on the character like decorations, or better portraits each of which can be viewed at the appropriate time. The obvious and easy justification of this approach to character and plot is the catch-phrase "barbaric" as all human behaviour is seen by Ibsenite as flawed, this view allows him to include in his cast a female as hunter, clatching a butterfly net, a Thane of Cawdor who has Glens as a courtier's dummy, and a Lady Duncan who doubles as Macbeth's spouse and a witch. It's all fairly ingenious and daring, but it would be wrong to mistake these qualities either for technique or for an honest examination of the questions the play proceeds to raise.

These reservations aside, the Adelaide University Theatre Guild and its director are to be commended for their tackling of the play. A touch of provincialism is easily needed on the Adelaide theatrical scene at present, and it is encouraging to see such a group setting itself tasks which although not solved altogether by the production, have provoked challenging and direct responses from cast and director.

Not the least of the producer's merits is the highly effective, expressive set design and use of lighting. It's a relief to see confirmed a conviction that the stage does not need to be as cluttered with furniture and props that it looks at her like an antique dealer's hideout or a trendy, red-carpeted apartment suite. The

performance area remains bare but for a scene, the occasional use of a throne and curtain with steps, and a lefty Indian square built of four perpendicular columns, and cross-beams which do not meet. Set as the finale, this effective stage is used consistently in the second act, although at times there was just the suggestion that the machinery was being set in motion for its own sake. And the single idea of an enormous length of floating grey cloth, sweeping from the front of the stage down, in graduated peaks towards back-stage middle was again an effective conclusion of the tone — as appropriate to the theme as it is to architecture — that "less is more" in conjunction with the skilful and suggestive lighting. The set tended, however, to overshadow both performers and play.

As an exception, Sue Baker's Lady Duncan/Parricide was full of energy and promise, vocally strong and physically displaying attributes that clearly provoke a response in *Macbeth*, she provided the focal point for the production. And although none of the other actresses tended in their dialogue to neutralise the characters, the gold fish she displayed on appropriate occasions was worn with both style and a conviction that this former *David* had more to offer than is usually available in traditional productions of *Macbeth*. In this respect, Ibsenite's re-viewing of the character in both male and female, and the double perspective was well illustrated in Ms Baker's performance.

In the Ibsenite-*Macbeth* double act, Peter Bowen and Rob Brockman also had some good moments, apart from some miscommunication with their lines. But they, like everyone in the production, clearly uphold the value of clear diction and the director has certainly got his priorities right on this score. Elsewhere there were some problems: the first act lost momentum and became somewhat muddled, and some of the repeated exchanges between Duncan and Macbeth could have been both more comic and more chilling than they proved. But the second act, which takes much of the emotional action of Shakespeare's text as a bleak portrait was cleverly managed and full of vigour. On this evidence, Martin Coleman has much to offer and his progress, together with that of the Theatre Guild, deserves to be watched with more than passing interest.

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Ravages

"John Wood now knows who he is laughing at and when to stop laughing."

Ravages: Two new plays written and directed by John Wood. La Mama Theatre Melbourne. Opens 2 March 1977. *Men Over Head*: Neilson Neilson, Coed, Tim Robertson. Freddy, Peter Cummings. Dropping: In and Herb Over Head: Peter Kerr. La Mama Theatre, 444 Little Dock.

In 1974 a Melbourne Theatre Company actor, John Wood, wrote a farcical *Men Over Head* (and *Herb Over Head* which was produced by the Australian Performing Group in the From Theatre of the From Factory Melbourne). It was a laboured comic piece, spiced from complete unremittingly by some skilfully observed impersonations: Max Gillies (Ginsberg), Les Manning (Checco) and Evelyn Krage (Harper).

The two new plays in the *Ravages* season — *Dropping: In* and *Herb Over Head* — are different and more substantial pieces. While neither is marked by the derivative and contrived that characterized the *Men Over Head*, *Herb Over Head* is the most original and sustained of the two. Both pieces are confidently naturalistic and in command of their language and style. Wood is still writing comedy, but now he knows who he's laughing at and when to stop laughing.

Dropping: In is a macabre short encounter which takes place on an outer suburban door step. But, despite thoroughly convincing performances by the three actors involved, it doesn't quite come off. As an understandably disturbed, deserted young mother, Lady Clark was suitably all-bellows-bus-time beneath a black comic facade. In the play she is forced into confronting her past by the deliriously relaxed couple who drop in on her. As the hapless dead husband, Bruce Kerr gave another of his painstakingly observed performances, and as his tight-lipped but voracious wife, Sue Jones was suitably proper and snitty. The play opens well with a meticulously played scene of conjugal despair, and the tension builds to a succession of ordinary injuries (casually related by the young woman however, towards the end the tension falls away and the denouement is predictable and stagy.

Herb Over Head treats two fine actors, Peter Cummings and Tim Robertson, with Sue Jones in a tight, sustained examination of the inadequacies of the Australian male. Set in the adjoining kitchen and bedroom



or another suburban house on Anzac Day, the play begins in the morning over breakfast and ends late that evening over the husband (Tim Robertson) a decorated Anzac hero, returns home boozed and having more bottles to find his wife (Sue Jones) in bed with her wartime mate, Freddy (Peter Cummings), the man whose life he had saved. What is so dramatically impressive is the way in which the four scenes of the play change and build the tension by contrasting mood, which ranges from the funny, wine-cracking opening through tender, furrow love-scenes and the inevitably violent finale.

Throughout, the characterization is complex enough to make us the previously established moods while simultaneously creating a new one. Tim Robertson plays Coed, the aggressive alcoholic whose idea of human engagement is the pub. Neilson (Sue Jones) is his ignored but still trying wife, who attempts to correct their flagging relationship. He responds with sarcasm and grunts, but she has some midwife left and can give as good as she gets, and a wholesale clanging match ensues in which they valiantly plough around each other. Her purpose is constructive — she wants him to see what he is doing to her and their relationship — whereas he merely characterizes her as the nagging bitch, and withdraws in the march and the pub. There is no way he will allow himself

to be drawn into the affective world of interpersonal relationships, he alone begins to resolve the ongoing dilemma of his relationship to her. Their argument does not seem particularly intimate, and, although he says he won't come back, it is obvious to all and that when he does she will forgive, though not forget entirely. Throughout the argument she has made passing references to Freddy, the lightest member of the war who was Coed's glorious war record. Freddy, the untested and perhaps alcoholic who regularly turns up every Anzac Day to drink (as Neilson's eyes) in the hero's kit and call her "the mother".

Peter Cummings as Freddy, had the more difficult role. Freddy has to live up to expectations and create new ones. He has to have traces of the former object of Neilson's pity while first becoming the alternative to Coed, and the object of her newly awakened desire.

While Coed had at moments a certain brutal charm and a heavy jaw set where, Freddy's appeal is usually defined in negative terms, as unlike Coed, he is not a war hero, not aggressive and burning with hatred, not excessive and indifferent to Neilson's tenderness and sexuality. He is also, significantly, no longer an alcoholic and not Neilson's husband. This negation of Coed must be transformed into an actual man whom Neilson wants for a lover — not her husband's man, but her own lover. Peter Cummings maintained the tension between what Freddy had formerly been to Neilson and what he was to her now, and created a sympathetic character. Even when they are in bed, Freddy is still calling her "mother" and profusely and genuinely apologizing for the inconvenience, just as on previous Anzac Days he would say when asked to stay for dinner, "Thanks mum, I wouldn't want to put you on." The scenes between Freddy and Neilson as they tentatively explore the boundaries of their mutual attraction were deeply understood by the writer-director and the actors, and remarkably touching. They had no doubt of witty self-awareness which prevented them from becoming too dry and pretentious.

The play ends in violent confrontation when Coed finally comes home. It takes a while for her to realize what has happened and he even asks Neilson, who has barely wrapped a dressing-gown around her, why she isn't wearing a nightie. But when the realization hits, his thought processes are swift and predictable. They fight when Coed attacks Neilson, and Freddy has his revenge on the man whom he always envied for saving him.

■ Suzanne Spinner is the theatre critic of the Melbourne Times.

The School for Scandal

"The play . . . desperately requires startling and muscular treatment, which it didn't receive"

The School for Scandal by R. B. Sheridan
Melbourne Theatre, Melbourne Theatre
March Director: Alan Lister; designer, Tony
Tippa; choreography, Jan Dimping.

Lady Snootwell, Sandy Gore; Squire, Robert
Hewitt; Mastermost, Peter Brown; Joseph Sir-
rino, Gerald Maguire; Maria, Sally Cobelli;
Mrs. Candour, Anna Hancock; Crispin
Barnard Hepple, Rex Benjamin; Becking, Gary
Brown; Sir Pizarro, Leslie; Susan, Catherine
Rowley; David, Raymond; Lady, Elaine
Nash; Kate, Mastermost; Anne, Judith; Sir
Oliver, Geoffrey; Jack, Tony; Maria, Bruce
Miles; Trip, Robert Brown; Charles, Geoffrey
David; Dawson, Caroline; Barry Hill, Master-
most; Ray, Barbara; Gains, and a Butler, Ray
Bartholomew; Kate, Denise; Peter Brown, Anna Hancock

March is one of the capitals turned-out to be a time of celebrating openings for Australian theatregoers — Queensland Theatre Company with *Heaven's Choice*, Tasmanian Theatre Company with *The Sound of Music*, South Australian Theatre Company with *The School for Scandal*, and *The School for Scandal* yet again by the Melbourne Theatre Company to mark their occupation of the Athenaeum Theatre, which has had its stage modernised and re-equipped. Refurbish here or tear, rather than imaginative innovation, seems to be the name of the game for March this year.

There are hard times, or regressive times, for local, indigenous drama. Now it has the Englishness of Australian theatre been more evident. Nearly every major company is controlled by an Englishman (imagine that in cricket or rugby). The stylistic tyranny of camp theatricalism is still pervasive, a kind of gaudy yet insidious imperialism. Sydney, that credible and teachable of British fashion, revivis, like the Western Republic at its worst, in the ideas of transatlantic actresses and hatch foppery, a sad paradise for the fettered and *frustrated*.

The Australian Performing Group with its universal homogenous entertainment *The Wild Family Show*, leads a difficult to win battle here in its attempt to tear. So tedious and obscure is the situation in the moment, that new writers with a new angle or even perspective are immediately elevated to the status of a cult. The movement of the generation has rather depressingly tried to make qualitative or profound enough as conventional or

tabooed theatre in this country. The stakes are perils, implacably rejecting and accumulating anything that is fresh and challenging, or else opening and patently

walling a cliff.

It was with these gloomy thoughts that I sat through, part enjoyed, part deplored, a competent and standard production of Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* at the new Athenaeum. After an hour into the first half, my head and soul were very sore. The evening exemplified a lot of the things I had been summing about.

Of course *The School for Scandal* is a study in surface affectation, a comedy of



L to R: Gore, Hancock, Hepple

false manner, an expose of hypocrisy and self-serving. It launches conventional trusty talents with oily material. The play is to well known, so well tried, it desperately requires standing and muscular treatment, which it didn't receive.

For all its intricate twists and cynical wit, *The School for Scandal* ultimately announces itself into the good and the villainous, the former victorious, the latter rebuffed. These simple divisions cry out for some ironic qualifications, an element of parody in the happy ending, some melancholy in the outcomes, a will of the miserables in the prologues.

Ray Lawler's production is somewhat stock, few of these evil yet authentically comic possibilities are explored — we are tempted to believe that the characters will have learned by their experience. The sense of an ethical journey was certainly there. What was lacking for me was a final comic edge — a hint of some attractiveness in human behaviour to mitigate the end of the end.

Nevertheless, the production presented some good performances, particularly that of Irene Jacobson as Mrs Candour — stylish and comprehensively alert to all the manifestations of character steadily around her. Bruce Myles was curiously avoided all the pitfalls of anti-sentiment in his Moses, and indeed created a most agreeable little grandfather from the first. And Simon Chivers once again showed what a excellent deadpan performer he is with his dull realisation of Sir Peter Teazle.

David Bryant also shone within the limits of the interpretation of Charles Surface — he seemed attracted by the savagery of degenerate conduct. The Melbourne Theatre Company has always been as deftly with violence and sexual squallor on stage — to not be the fogged light in the ocean production of *The Doll* and the tentative nature of Charles and his friends in this play. We had the usual few token drinks (singing alone, a barely song, and usually the wanton type) looking some call here, some before them, and during, you guessed it, on a table.

Frank Thring, who is not as visible as he used to be, appeared marvelously incongruous as the successful English merchant from the East Sir Oliver Surface. Somehow he contrived to look like some stockless Puritan from the Mayflower, or have wandered in from a nearby production of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. His performance, a rather exhausted and halting one on opening night, failed to earn much stage on the audience: the type of audience who over the years have extended to Mr Thring more affectionate indulgence than the Page could ever supply.

The rest of the large cast, either copied without imagination and flat, or were plain inelegant. The members of the School for Scandal itself, much more than a mere mirror of gossip, were more tough, self-conscious or manipulative enough for me. Richard the Affectionate and Popery are some horrible little minds. I

didn't really see them, there was no real thrust to the decent and honourable in the plot.

Smile: a gift of a role to a physical actor, was given a stiff and fairly predictable rendition by Robert Hewitt. Sally Cadell's Maria was the subservient stereotypical of the wretched beauty. Similarly, Natalie Kene's Lady Teazle, who also displayed an increasing of event or opening night, something that will surely be traced out as the run proceeds.

The set seemed cramped and stodgy, overpowered in addition by embracing huge walls of wood paneling. The costumes, as well, were antiquated and the story of every landscape. The theatre itself would be immediately improved by one thing: a bomb. Doubtless the MTC will do pretty well with the Athenaeum. It has a superb central location, occupies an old-world atmosphere, and will provide the public with a palatable fare, plays of traditional workmanship, the kind that regularly appear on a HSC syllabus and still elicits adoration from the theatre audience as they enter the good trade.

It is two hundred years since *The School for Scandal* was first performed in London. At the risk of sounding overblown for once, I wouldn't really care if it were not performed in this country for the next two hundred years, unless of course some unconscionable dog of a director, with a red coat, came along and gawped at its wit, ignoring all the possible conveniences of the past.

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The Fall Guy

"Linda Aronson is . . . an accomplished playwright, and I look forward to seeing more of her work"

The Fall Guy by Linda Aronson. Melbourne Theatre Company, Russell Street Theatre, Melbourne. Opened 29 March. Director and Designer, Nick Radger; choreography, Don Franklin.

Jack, Norman Kaye, Gordon, Tessa Devereux, Hughie, Marvyn Drake, Sean, Stephen Oldfield.

A critic used of Linda Aronson's play *The Fall Guy* that there was "a good play trying to get out". Another used of Jack Willard's of *Tenor to Meika* that it would have been better if it had been a one-act play like his *Les Dancés*. He most stands accused of writing sprawling, under-explored plays. Williamson is compared unfavourably to experiments of the well-made "naturalistic" play and at the same time is thought to be a more reproducer of "naturalism".

There is, it seems to me, a disconnection with an absence of what might be called "craft", and a neo-romantic attitude to the psycho-social experience called "human".

Craft, of course, exists in many different forms. A craftsman may make a chair impossible to sit on or falling down on the job. However good it might look, sitting is its prime function. We might admire the beauty of its delicate construction, its superb finish, its curved legs, but if it falls over it is not a chair. That is, if it doesn't work it's no good.

In the theatre "craft" seems to have taken on another meaning. When critics talk about it, they are not referring to the quality of the writing, or the imagination, or even what happens between text, actor and audience, but something more mechanical construction. This is more or less a hangover from a concern with the values of narrative fiction, transposed into the "well-made play". Unfortunately, the whole trend of 20th-century theatre has been away from facts of construction, towards a kind of truth and effect in performance. A kind of functional craftsmanship.

And in Australia, what's more, the use of forms derived or starting from Brecht, Expressionism, the Absurd, melodrama and anything else that seems useful at the time, proceeds upon Australian playwrights seem to be great collectors of styles, using any device that makes a moment work. Fortunately, there are a few



directors, including the playwrights themselves, letting the plays stand up and be counted.

Linda Aronson's *The Fall Guy* is episodic in structure and presents a set of character types and situations in a domestic arena. It is very much concerned with appearances: the surfaces of the characters and how they perceive they fit into their little societies, how they speak. It is not concerned with the historical realism of the characters so much as the emotional truth of episodes between them. And even these realisations are a long way from sentiment.

For me it was something of a relief to see a detached attitude to characters and situations that could easily have become makeshift Aronson style (perhaps closer to Mamet's in *The Morning World*) than anyone else's, though on a more modest scale and subject. I was glad to see something that concerned not only old society artists and the theatre but also gay liberation, made unobtrusively.

The Fall Guy is Jack (Norman Kaye), an old variety artist. He sings a bit, dances a bit and tries to get laughs. In truth he isn't, as we see it, is not very good. He is the last remnant of an era that one Norman has faded from, and his partner of 28 years, Gordon (Tessa Devereux) is sick of playing the fool, as he has to in the artist's latest incarnation. Gordon walks out on the partnership.

Norman Kaye's Jack, not very serious, but an enthusiastic. Likes people a lot, really pulled. A perpetual optimist, a drunk, a

servitor with a pastyised arm. Not a real comedian, he has no sense of place in the world and is unable to turn his loser's personality into anything funny. Not aware of himself, but self-protecting. A fall guy, a patsy.

Gordon, on the other hand, although he has a lingering sense of friendship for Jack, wants out and up. But all his half-hearted efforts to help Jack only leave him laughing on the end of his rope.

Counterpointing Jack's decline — the distance from having an act and then not having one — is a pair of guys, Sean, an escaped student, and Hughie, a music, game-playing manipulator also have a relationship in trouble. Sean (not well played by Stephen Oldfield) is a serious-minded gay artist wanting to do his MA and get on in the world like Gordon. Hughie (exemplarily performed by Marvyn Drake), though in love with Sean, doesn't let that interfere with his fights of fun.

One of these games is his playing along with Jack in a pub where they have just met. Gordon comes to see Jack. Jack pretends he already has a new partner in Hughie. Hughie keeps up the facade until he sets up Jack with a date at a gay club. Jack thinks this is his big break, really it's another step on the way down. Gordon's attempt to help is a spot on an important club show. Jack's rejection and final response is so abject everyone he thinks has brought him to this pass. The management turns off the lights, leaving Jack on a dark, empty stage, taking the fall.

Nick Radger allows the play to do its own job, aided by terrific performances from Norman Kaye and Marvyn Drake. The setting is simple and the sole bit of gimmickry, in the occasion of Jack's performance to the gay lobby, is very well realised. Nick Radger has Jack perform in front of a curtain so if to an audience downstage, with his "friends", and on, behind it. His triumphant return backstage with the glowing knowledge that he has been had is a fine moment.

Linda Aronson is already an accomplished playwright, and I look forward to seeing more of her work. It doesn't suppose either the effort or the political way of the gay lib will like *The Fall Guy* a lot, for the same reason that sentimentalists of *The Ten* (etc) won't. Both have been used as emblems of a culture in decay in a play that left me feeling a bit depressed, but appreciative of a new talent. May many more drop from the firm.

Leading Lady

"Bright entertainment . . . geared to the talents of Jill Perryman . . ."



Leading Lady, a musical revue starring Jill Perryman. St. Martin's Theatre Melbourne. Opened 13 March. Produced by William Gers. Songs: John McKellar. With: Bryan Davies, Darrell Hilson.

Choreography: Rodger Board. Costumes: Bob Graham. Musical Direction: Philip Scott. Lyrics: Philip Scott. Book: Craig Ross. Woodward: David Bennett. Presented by Kate Hare and William Gers.

Attending the press reception for *Jill Perryman* in Melbourne, and hearing the star talk about the show she was going to appear in at the St Martin's Theatre, made me feel rather apprehensive. Everything she mentioned about it gave the impression it would turn out to be one of those uncomfortable evenings when the leading lady would appear strange, that is, the content. From past experience I know it was impossible for Perryman to give a dud performance. But when John McKellar has formerly disappointed me with his material, wonderful ideas which fall apart in the writing, sometimes over writing. All that I heard at this press conference seemed to indicate this would again be the result.

Happily, I can report that, as seen at the St. Martin's, *Leading Lady* is a bright, entertaining, extremely amusing, geared to the talents of Perryman, who is more than ably supported by Bryan Davies and

Darrell Hilson. The original show ran for six months at Sydney's theatre restaurant the Music Loft. For its presentation in the 40th-anniversary St. Martin's, apparently some 50 per cent of the musical is different.

A description of the thin plot-line running through the "musical revue" makes it appear silly and banal, which it really is not. With the show's leading lady, her understudy, and all other possible replacements killed off by one poison, audience providing an suitable substitute, a desperate chance is taken on an ungainly path from the Bush, Gladys Zalc. Of course a comic like that just has to be changed. She therefore becomes Jill Dick, and soon reveals she possesses star quality, which she repeatedly proves, scores a huge success in Hollywood and finally ends up in an old actors' home, but knows it to make a comeback.

In reality it is a head-punch, with songs from past Philip Street revues ranging with standard waxes of the last half-century, overtones from musicals of the last decade and even a nodding of *The 13 Hour Day*. Frequently the words of well-known numbers are changed to fit the moment and locality, which is where McKellar excels.

There are several Southsides numbers ("Broadway Baby", "Send in the Clowns", "Comedy Tonight!"),

showstoppers like "Let me Entertain You" and "If They Could See Me Now" and finally Perryman on stage alone with a group of songs which inevitably include "People" and "Don't Run On My Parade" (from her big hit show *Funny Girl*). One regretted through the absence of "Flamingo Apache", her show-stopper from "I Do, I Do".

Never before has one been able to see so much of Perryman on stage, displaying every facet of her huge talent, amazing the fact yet again she is Australia's one big star, with "star quality" apparent every time she steps foot on stage. To see her change visually and vocally in rapid succession in the portrayals of characters in the audience agrees it is such the extent of her versatility. A shy weak, a slight hinting of an epidemic, a dishevelled look or an overbright smile, subtly achieved with perfect timing, which is the result of more than 20 years' stage experience. Perryman's vocal talent of course is never in doubt (but it was tough on her going straight into two Gershwin numbers before regaining breath from a dance routine).

This all stresses the fact it is really "the evening with Jill Perryman." At the same time, the talents of Davies and Hilson should not be under-rated. As a duo they constantly make one forget their real purpose is to hold the fort while Perryman is changing, in truth they are always at her level. At one point Hilson gives a convincing rendition of Coward's "Why Must the Show Go On?", and there's a delightful "I Remember It Well" with an aged Perryman and Davies in the actors' home.

The show has no lavish sets, but Perryman appears in a fine array of costumes, and the two men are well served with, in the first half, mainly basic black, and, in the second, red-and-black and bright outfits.

Craig Ross's Band (who would be perfectly capable herself of understating Perryman) has provided the necessary choreography, fully realising anything spectacular would be out of place. A three-piece orchestra under the direction of pianist Philip Scott, more than adequately furnishes the show's musical backing. And the overall scene head of that post-episode of crime, William Gers, is everywhere apparent, particularly in the slick pacing and quick changes.

Leading Lady is not a great show. It probably could not exist without Jill Perryman. But with the present combination of Perryman, plus the talented Davies and Hilson, it presents an evening of sheer unguessed enjoyment.

Directed
by

Ken G. Hall

Australia's most successful producer and director of films in the 1930s was Ken G. Hall, whose book *Directed by Ken G. Hall: The Autobiography of an Australian Film-Maker*, will be published in June by Lansdowne.

In addition to newspapers, Hall made 17 feature films, almost all of which were outstanding box office successes.

Three extracts from the book are published here. The first extract tells of his meeting with the writer Bert Bailey — a meeting which led to the making of *Our Silverass*, the first of the famous series of "Dad and Dave" comedies. In the second extract, he talks about *Throughbred*, one of his more ambitious films. In the third, he reveals reservations about recent policies of government aid to the film industry, a subject which is developed controversially in the later chapters of the book.

It was a late knock and the man who followed it into the office was tallish, spare, with a thin face and a strong, hooked nose. I had not seen him before. At least, I had not seen him as himself.

Yet the unexpected entry to my office that morning late in 1930 changed the whole course of my life.

He had friendly, humorous eyes and as he held out his hand he said, "Ken Hall?"

I'm Bert Bailey. I believe we are going to make a picture together.

If he had said he believed we were about to climb Everest together I could not have been more shaken. "That's great! But I wish someone had told me about it!"

"You're late," he said. "I just left Stuart and it's off now."

Stuart was Stuart F. Doyle, managing director of Urban Theatres, Australasian Films — and a flock of subsidiary companies. I was officially assistant to the managing director and resounded in a rather sumptuous carpeted office on the eleventh floor of the State Theatre building in Sydney — not because I cared it, but because it was previously the office of a director of the company who had died.

Seeing my confusion, Bailey said, "You're interested, aren't you?" I assured him I most certainly was interested. "What are we going to make?"

"I thought you'd have guessed that."

I was not doing very well. I had yet to learn actors are 'different' people, even the very good ones.

"Oh, the *Silverass* of course! *Our Silverass*." I gave him as it is the Polaris a couple of years ago. You were great, Mr Bailey, and it was a treat to see a house full about laughing like it did that night."





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(love?)
Papers

He gave me confirmation: "Yes, the old Selecons. It's been good to me!"

I have from trade gossip that it had been more than good to him. He'd made a small fortune from it since, in collaboration with Edmund Duggan in 1962, he had adapted it from Steele Rudd's best-seller. They bought the dramatic rights from Arthur Hony Davis, who was of course Steele Rudd. The play opened at the King's Theatre, Melbourne, on 11th October 1912, under the management of Busby & Grant with Bert Busby as Dad (and producer) and Fred Macdonald as Dave. Those two for the first time projected Rudd's characters up from the printed page, and the public immediately accepted the images they created. They have long since gone into Australian folklore and endured as no other Australian character creations have been able to endure. The play immediately became, and for many years remained, a box-office smash in the cities and the country on constant tours.

Despite all this, I had mental reservations about making *On Our Selection*. I was young enough, and still lacking in practical showmanship background enough, to want to "do something better". But at least I had the common sense to shut up about it at that point. It had not, what developed into a warm, personal friendship from that day and continued until Bert's death in 1953 at the age of eighty-two, might never have happened and I, far more than he, would have been the loser. And I would very likely not be writing this book. We made our own fate. Fate came here together in the next few years.

There are still lessons to be learned by young directors and producers at the very outset, long before they get involved in actual production. The lessons are not taught in film schools because the teachers, as those schools don't even know about them, much less understand them. They have nothing to do with technique, artistic control, organisation, acting, direction, writing. But those lessons are fundamental background to, and in fact control, the single vital decision, the fifty-four-thousand-dollar question that we have a one-hundred-million-dollar answer to: it is in *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now* shall we make?

In my unremitting I would have opted for the vague "something better". Doyle and Busby were older and wiser men and went, for the sure-fire material the Selecons provided. The film proved a bonanza, and I learned a vital lesson.

The burgeoning returns from the first three films had made it possible to create our studio space over the whole area of the original sitting room, about 130 feet by 80 feet — big enough to do anything we would ever need. The sound-proofing was far from being completely satisfactory, however, it was too vast a job to be done properly and the cost would have been prohibitive. We put up

with it, there was no alternative. There were dog barks, howling faint, in the second track of many films, even as late as *Scrooge*, where dog barks certainly were not called for.

For *Thoroughbred* I built up the sets, allowed myself the luxury of an assistant director for the first time. An important departure from the team was Frank Harley, who headed up a new industrial division we set up, as producer-director and cameraman, as a mark of industrial consciousness made for major clients like BHP and others. He was wadded to the early insistence on "depth of focus", which meant peering at the light and stepping down the lens with office "burl" photographic results. Cap had always used the van for his source of illumination, had not worked inside to any extent until he joined us.

George Heath, who had been second camera on *Grounded Rudd*, succeeded Harley as chief of cinematography and did such an outstanding job that he remained in that capacity through our ensuing four-film pictures, including *Scrooge*, after the five years break caused by the war. George was a student of photography, carefully studying the work of the top Americans and Germans, reading, going to the movies, waiting it out off and when his chance came he was ready and rarely put a photographic foot wrong from the day he was appointed to the job on *Thoroughbred*.

George Heath, in my opinion, was the father of the modern style of black-and-white photography in feature films in Australia. Unconsciously opposed to Harley's style, Heath cut down sharply on the amount of light used and opened up the lens to compensate. His methods produced extremely light images against soft appearing backgrounds. Where Harley was shooting generally at 5.6 or 6.3 in the studio, Heath's exposures were usually around 2.8 to 3.2. The often "hard", crucially sharp look had gone and now we had rounded, beautifully warm images like those produced by Lee Garmes, James Wong Howe, Gregg Toland, Karl Freund, Hal Rosson, Busby West, Ernst Hiller and so many of the highly experienced cameramen of Hollywood's heyday.

The elevation of Heath and the arrival of George Kenyon — professionally it. Also, but a warm, friendly and highly talented man who was George to everyone — were two events which had a far-reaching effect on Queensland's rapid technical development. Technically we'd always been ahead of our competitors. For instance, the sound scoring from Arthur Smith's Australian-made recorders was superior to that being achieved from the virtually "gold-plated" American RCA gear imported by Frank Thring, and used of course on all Eflon features. It was not that Smith's gear was better or even as good as its imported competition. The fine technical precision given to the recordings the melodic, and their treatment in the laboratory was responsible for the sound

'edge' we had both on Eflon and the British-equipped Pagewood plant at National studios.

George Kenyon, an Englishman and an artist of considerable quality, had been a set designer and scenic artist for J. C. Williamson. Doyle was closing down the Union Theatrical workshop and so most of necessity set up our own art department and workshop. Kenyon seemed to be the man we needed because, with his varied talents, he was potentially right to head the special effects division which I wanted to set up as soon as possible. He got that responsibility reasonably soon after, when an Australian architect, Eric Thompson, who had spent some years as an assistant in the art department of MGM in Hollywood, returned to Australia and we took him into the team.

The fourth new man in was Ronald Whelan, the assistant director I'd allowed myself. He'd had some experience in England and from then on our script breakdowns and our shooting schedules were much better organised. For the benefit of those unused to production parlance, the term "assistant director" is a misnomer. The big directors overseas often had three or more assistants ("Yes sir, Mr. De Mille, whenever you say?"). They do not assist the director to direct. Their job is organisation ahead of the director, first with the script breakdown and preparation of the shooting schedule in consultation with the director, then making sure every detail is ready, actors know their lines and are on the set on time.

Carl De Mille, with his huge spectacles and thousands of critics, had up to six assistants. They were because another important part of their job is the control of movements of extras on the set while the director is concentrating on his principals and the vital foreground action.

With *Thoroughbred* we were using back projection for the first time and learned pretty fast that it was full of traps. But Kenyon and George Heath, with Stuart Babcock, projectionist, combined especially well to get the most important innovation off the ground.

There was a great deal of trial and error before we got it working satisfactorily. The early experimental shots looked all right to the eye, but when we saw the film projected, the background action was dark on one side or the other. Reason? The eye of the camera was not looking directly, and mechanically correctly but it is said, into the eye of the projector and we got "fall-off". Use too wide a lens on the projector, or camera for that matter, and you get "hot spots", a hot centre to the image and fall-off all round it. The lens eye-to-eye but was and is fundamental, but no one had thought to tell us. To get the consistent results later achieved on the so very precise back projection, we found it necessary to call in surveyors, who worked out the precise angles and distances. These were permanently marked into the studio concrete floor with special studs. There was no margin for error.

A horse-racing picture seemed to be a natural for most audiences, particularly Australians, and *Thoroughbred* in the theatre proved that the theory was not wrong. But getting it on the screen was not all that easy because the film was big in size and scope for our limited resources.

If I had an American writer and was to have an American star John McCormack, had I found that Helen Twelvetrees — "a name to remember" — was willing to come to Australia at the price we were offering, but would be bringing her husband and baby with her. Husband? Baby?

We didn't like the sound of that just at all. In the twenties and thirties female stars were not supposed to have husbands and certainly not babies.

Twelvetrees was, from her photographs, still beautiful and we knew her to be a sound actress. She had been leading woman in a number of major studio feature films and had starred in numerous "B" movies of a good general standard. She was as good a name within reasonable bounds as one could hope to get. McCormack's casting was always based on a figure that could be recognized in the home market, Australia and New Zealand.

We had a publicity conference with Herb Maynard and his boys and decided to keep the baby secret. We knew we could get tremendous publicity for the film with the arrival of a real live Hollywood movie star and we certainly did with the show these boys put on for the arrival of Helen Twelvetrees. Half Sydney was at the docks.

The husband they could play right down and perhaps no harm would be done to her image in a beautiful and highly desirable, though unobtainable, young woman. But the baby? Film stars just did not have babies. If they did they never talked about them, a mother's filial longings blown out, but a hard fact then.

So it was decided, and Helen knew all about the plan, that the child would be taken off the map by a specially engaged nurse before the ladies and gentlemen of the Press got to talk with the couple.

I worked Helen, her husband and child lived in an apartment at Darling Point and no one disturbed them. Helen's daily working and social life was obvious with publicity. But her private life was strictly private. There never was a publicity campaign like the one behind Helen Twelvetrees. It had a hundred fronts. My good friend Bill Squire, at the time starting up as General Motors import Sydney outlet, provided a Pontiac with limousine driver to transport Helen anywhere she wanted to go. And whenever she went she stopped the traffic. She was mobbed outside Farmer's store when she went to shop and it took a phalanx of police to clear the docks. But the highlight was the Lord Mayor's civic reception at the Town Hall. It was a big show with members of the town and their wives crowding to talk to Helen.

The Lord Mayor, Alderman McIlhenny, made it a great day for the town and for us. At the end of his speech of welcome, he

grabbed Helen and planted a smacker for us on her mouth. The Press cameramen were caught flat-footed. "Again please," they pleaded. "We weren't ready."

But that did not have to plead. Helen Twelvetrees could hardly be restrained and obliged again and again.

Her Hayward recalls that Jack Woody, Twelvetrees's husband, gurgled in his ear. "What's with the guy — he got lost past?" Which Hayward never was the first time we heard the expression.

The Lord Mayor's obligatory advertisement with the beautiful Hollywood star made a field day for the Press night around Australia.

The story that Helen was a mother with a child never did break, but others, far more serious, almost did.

Just where do we stand in all this? In five years no sign of a constructive plan has emerged. It does not appear that there ever was a real, significant, well-considered concept laid down from which an industry might grow. The new-era production has been a series of individual, wild, catch-as-catch-can scrambles. Get yourself a script, get it approved, get some money from the Film Development Corporation, scurry round and on that promise traffic up the rat trail from private sources get together a production crew from here and there — and off we go. It's hardly the way to make successful motion pictures, to build an industry.

From the outset, it was necessary to take a long, hard look at any plan of Government assistance to an ailing film industry wherever such a plan has been implemented. New Zealand have been successful. When did you last see a Canadian feature film?

The most notable casualty has been the British film-production industry, now at depths as low as this. And yet the British have had "quality" and "class" and dozens of various kinds since the early thirties. None of them has worked effectively including the much-vaunted Eady Plan, new in concept.

I quote from an article in the authoritative trade paper *London Screen International* of 27 September 1973 under the heading "LABOUR PROBLEMS IN THE FILM INDUSTRY".

It presents (in part) the report of a study group, chaired by Mrs. Robert Short, MP, and working for the Labour Party's national executive committee. It begins by saying it views the film industry "not only in commercial terms but also in its contribution to the culture of Britain".

It goes on: "The feature film industry is now in serious decline and the whole industry is in need of immediate fundamental, long-term financing and re-organization. We fully accept that Britain cannot be self-supporting in the supply of films for its home market and that its film industry will continue to be linked to a wider international market."

That unhappy situation has come about

despite all the plans, including the Eady Plan. In considering this statement it is as well to be cognisant of the fact that the population of the British home market alone is roughly four times that of Australia. In view of that, and used the euphemism of some mutual success, it is as well for Australian film-makers to take stock of themselves and the industry they want to create.

For a start the Australian industry can never be a big industry. Not while we have a population of only fourteen million people. And twenty million would not make much difference.

The countries outside the United States with big or even reasonably sized film industries — Japan, Russia, Italy, India, Germany, France, Sweden — just don't happen to have English as their native tongue. In most cases, and especially since the coming of sound, the language barrier has built up serious walls. The countries where feature-film production is flourishing are the English-speaking countries — and that statement does not exempt the United States. Hollywood's production is never things less than the peak of the thirties. Why? Because the demand is not there. Because the main-street is no longer as keen to go to the movies as he used to be. It costs him too much for a start — as much as a night out at a big musical comedy in a legitimate theatre used to cost us long ago.

When a producer begins calculating how much he'll get for his overseas sale — figures I get used to using in hopeful but basically dishonest prognostications from away back in the thirties — he is coughing trouble. He'll get damn little in the long run.

As far as I am aware, only five Australian films from the thirties on, and up to 1973 anyway, have independently broken into the American market, three of them as a State rights basis. Two were from Crossland, *Lovers and Luggare* (*Perseus of the Deep in the U.S.*) and *Opium of the Wilderness* (*Wild Frontier*). The third was Charles Chauvel's *Party Thousand* and *Marathon*, while the final two, handled by distributors (because they had a financial interest), were my own *Sandals* and Chauvel's *Sons of Matthew*. Returns to Australia from all of them would not add up to much.

I firmly believe Australian producers should stay with conservatively budgeted films. They should not be carried away by any overseas distributor's financial participation — MGM made many films in England, under some promise, but not many of them achieved general release in the U.S.

There is no doubt in my mind that high-budget films, on a risky, insecure market, are not a safe foundation for building an industry.

The figure each must earn before black ink shows in the ledger will be high indeed. The risks are too great. I do not believe we have the right to take them — yet.

International
Lively trends in

POLAND

Bogdan Gieraczynski

"... all art, including theatre, ought to remain outside the political framework"

Bogdan Gieraczynski is a widely requested Polish theatre journalist. His standing is indicated by the fact that the director of all his professions was recently granted an interview with *Reynold Camet*, leading actor in Jerzy Grotowski's *Laboratory Theatre*.

Polish theatre never managed to go freely to its vanity. Besides the classical theatre, the

avant-garde as well as the experimentalists have established themselves as consistently as in public theatre-givers all over the world.

One might well ask why. Well, it seems to me that the fate of the classical, the traditional, theatre has become largely outmoded, and thus an objective that is a great many countries. It is possible that the

situation is temporary, a result somehow of the appearance of experimental groups. The theatre of the avant-garde, which was beginning to take shape in the late fifties, overcame almost all the classically traditional conventions it made away with most of the scenic components, so characteristic of the traditional setting, and laid the main stress on bodily expression; it



Cross 2 Theatre's production of *The Great Class* by Tadeusz Kantor

simplified, and quite often excluded elements of scenography and costume, finally, a abolished the division into stage and actor, on the one hand, and audience and public on the other, thus providing spectators with active participation in a performance as part of a theatrical happening.

The appearance of these challenging "theatre experiences" has to some extent drawn the attention of a large portion of the public away from the classical theatre — while the spiritual leaders of the new-fangled theatres were prophesying a notable decline doom for the traditional theatre. As everybody knows now, this has not happened.

Some avant-garde theatres, mainly from third-world countries, have been concerned with politics more than with artistic inquiry. They have attempted to influence human minds and work on human emotions with the political content of their performances. Some of these ideas have, indeed, been quite edifying and enlightening, and yet it is difficult to resist the impression that they have been wrongly based. In my view all art, including the theatre, ought to remain outside the political framework. The theatre is not a parliamentary resource, although the reverse is quite often the case.

Polish theatrical art has had long-lived traditions, both as a classical and as an experimental form. The Polish avant-garde is rich in experience which has inspired artists all over the world. I think the reputation is largely due to the fact that Polish experimental theatres have managed to rid themselves of current, everyday human concerns to concentrate exclusively on technique, stage-scene, direction, acting and so on. It is, in other words, due to its interest in the purest art.

In this correspondence I should like to draw the Antislavic reader's attention to what has been only scratching in the Polish theatre lately. Classical theatres in Poland unfortunately seem to be permanently stagnating.

KANTOR — THEATRE FROM BEYOND

The phenomenon of Tadeusz Kantor's CRICOT 2 Theatre, of Cracow, has become quite an event in the world's theatrical map, not as a display of acting powers, but as a stage production. What does this signify in the context of Kantor's artistic experience? The director, fascinated with plastic art in the theatre, throws into theatrical relief a situation plastically framed. A plastic work thus transformed requires unequalled technicality. Staging is so concerned as to preclude any misinterpretation of the work performed.

The *Dead Class* is the latest present stage of the CRICOT 2 Theatre, a performance that might be described as a spiritualistic show. For, as during a spiritualistic act "something" from beyond is being experienced, participation in and reception of *The Dead Class* is only partial. Naturally, one can try to persuade oneself that one is

totally committed in the performance. Such an impression, however, will be false, for, as it is impossible to identify oneself with death, it is likewise impossible to do so with *The Dead Class*. And then precisely has Kantor's genius in constructs a work of art which cannot be emotionally perceived like *Mothers and Daughters* for example. The staging is consciously devised, for — as the artist himself says — "a work of art should be *possessible* like death."

Tadeusz Kantor's *The Dead Class* and Jerry Gotrowski's *Aperçus* came *Figura* (first produced eight years ago, with 12 performances in Australia in April and May of 1974) can be compared — contrariety of course — as a fundamental theme just as in Gotrowski's new *Aperçus* made it possible for the spectators fully to identify themselves with the performance, *The Dead Class*, in Kantor's view, precludes such a possibility. The antinomy of indifference and engagement, death and life. Both directors have managed consistently to realize these respective designs.

The Dead Class has been the most important, most impressive and most original of all the recent performances on Polish stages. One can well assume that it will have a long-standing, world-wide career like *Aperçus* came *Figura*. A stepping-stone to universal esteem was the first prize awarded to the theatre for the performance at the 10th Edinburgh Festival. Michael Billington wrote in *The Guardian* that if *The Dead Class* was not a masterpiece, then the word was devoid of meaning.

GOTROWSKI — WHAT NEXT?

It is often said that life is a theatre and theatre a life. In spite of its being as old as the hills, this saying is relevant and up-to-date. Indeed, the theatre not only finds inspiration in everyday life, but it also aims at interpreting its form and its content, that of all branches of art coming closest to life. Contemporary life is made up of all the components to be found in the theatre, such as games, learning, pretending, putting on a mask, acting, etc.

If, in some countries like, for instance, France, there is a decline due to people being fed up with the theatre around them — in the street, at work, in the shop, in the government and so on — why should one then go to the theatre?

The formula that life is a theatre (and vice versa) has been challenged by the artistic production of, among others, maybe even above all, Jerzy Gotrowski's Laboratory Theatre. This challenge lay in the roots of all Gotrowski's concepts from the moment the theatre was set up in 1959, leading through conventional and quasi-conventional performances to unconventional ones, culminating in para-theatrical experiments. The consequence of Gotrowski's activities was an absolute rejection of the formula that theatre is life and the other way round. As an example, one can cite *Aperçus* came *Figura* and para-theatrical experiments such as

Special Project, Acting Therapy, Acting Jewish and Mechanism-Abuse.

The next step in the activities of the Laboratory Theatre is to provide everyone who feels like it with the possibility of creative experience. This is done by means of different types of para-theatrical activity based on the idea of active participation.

These create the so-called active culture, by which is meant artistic creation which provides the public with such products as film, music, theatre, books, etc. There also exists a passive sort of culture which is called participation in culture. The difference between the two is that the former is destined for the privileged, whereas the latter is for virtually everybody.

In consequence of Gotrowski's para-theatrical experiments, the split role the creator and the recipient has ceased to exist. Everyone taking part actively in such a para-theatrical experience can find personal satisfaction resulting from his being a creative himself; he can satisfy his particular needs of a spiritual and sensory kind. It is in such an act of artistic creation that one experiences feelings analogous to those of a professional, say, an actor.

The latest para-theatrical programme of Gotrowski's that I have briefly characterized in the most original form of creation in Poland. But it is of interest to the international public, as can be inferred from such projects as the international project in France, Italy, Sweden, Venezuela, Canada and the U.S.

The results of the present artistic activities of Gotrowski's Theatre are fascinating and revealing. I shall come back to this problem in another article.

THEATRE WITHOUT WORDS

Pantomime is an ancient and unique form of art. Ancient because its roots are to be found in the Roman culture, and ancient because in the present it has become a sort of marginal art. Apart from Mimi Miroslaw, Jean-Louis Barrault, Sany Malhotra and Henryk Tomaszewski, it is practiced by a really no one. It is thus all the more pleasant for me to note the existence of the Pantomime Theatre in Poland directed by Henryk Tomaszewski.

Tomaszewski's pantomime is based on spectacle. Its creator does not practice the sort of pantomime he found when he entered this field that is, pantomime specializing in solo performances such as juggling, conversation conducted by means of gestures and so on. The notion "pantomime" has with Tomaszewski, acquired a new meaning and a new artistic expression which are the components of the modern structure of the total theatre. The performances of the Pantomime Theatre are filled with profound thought. In a metaphorical and elusive way, they address the viewer, provoking him to think and to imagine. That is why Tomaszewski's Theatre has broken all the barriers of cultural tradition and has become intelligible to people all over the world.

Fantasia: Screens from the Legend of Mr Twardowski was a recent production of the Panorama Theatre directed by Henryk Tomaszewski himself, and based on his scenario, and with his choreography. During the 20 years of the theatre's existence, it was the 14th production, which, in a way, is a summation-up of Tomaszewski's experience made thus far.

Though the performance was on the highest level, the newest familiar with most of Tomaszewski's previous productions is struck by one thing: the lack of elements that would allow him to regard it as a revelling or searching one. Tomaszewski has employed here all the techniques and ideas he has explored before, in this way becoming an imitator of himself?

Though I tried to obtain a photo of the performance, this turned out to be impossible. So the reader won't find any photo of the *Fantasia Screens*, because the director and managers of the Panorama Theatre are not interested in publicity, in fact, they find journalists and all publicity a pain in the ass! The appearance of Tomaszewski's Panorama Theatre is bigger than its beautiful and great art, and I'd like to warn all foreign journalists and the public about it.

Fantasia: Screens is based on a Polish legend dating back to the Middle Ages. The legend tells of a famous astrologer, fortune-teller and magician whose name was Twardowski.

The most characteristic motif of this legend is the kidnapping of Twardowski by a band of devils and placing him on the cross.

The spectacle is full of profound artistic and aesthetic values, in contrast to Tomaszewski's earlier performances in which philosophical and intellectual content was dominant.

In spite of its being close to a foreign theatre-goer, this production would nevertheless be intelligible to him by appealing to his senses, since it is like a colourful fairy tale.

This "materially stupider" performance is filled with the content that makes it possible for the viewer's imagination to play freely — the viewer finds many different worlds in silence.

ONE CLASSICAL PERFORMANCE

Outside my main concern, I would like to say a few words about the only classical performance that has caused much stir. I

am thinking about *The Wedding*, by Stanislaw Wygoszinski, which provided the 14th premiere of the Teatr Wybrzeze in Gdansk, and was produced for the 50th anniversary of this outstanding theatre.

The play is a Polish national drama depicting with dramatic realism the history of Poland, national struggles and the patriotism of Poles, thus becoming a representative picture of what is known as Polish. To a foreign spectator, the play is unintelligible in the way the Japanese Kabuki that is it, simply because it originated in a cultural tradition different from the European or American ones.

However, in the above-mentioned production (director, Stanislaw Hlaskowski; designer, Marian Kozlowski), the form seems to be so clear and so fabulously colourful as to become universal and more important than the content. Because of this, the performance is a great success in its appeal to foreign theatre-goers.

Even the theatre that is most deeply rooted in national tradition can speak a language intelligible to all people. Thus, I think, should be its aim in Poland, Australia, Africa, America — everywhere.



Teatr Wybrzeze production of Wygoszinski's *The Wedding*.

The Australian Dance Theatre

"Building a new company from scratch is extremely laborious and time-consuming"

When the old Australian Dance Theatre finally disbanded under the same name in 1975, after a rather disastrous Sydney season, some people thought that the group was better off dead rather than having to drag on its existence as it was. Others considered that the company was worth preserving, that it was severely disrupted at the time and that all that was needed was a replacement for the current artistic director, Elizabeth Dalman.

In 1974 there was a brief breather through the company in the form of former Nederlandse Dans Theatre director Joop Flör and his wife Willy de la Rye. Flör was appointed co-artistic director with Dalman, and, watching the company's performances from then on one was conscious of a rejuvenation amongst the dancers. Apart from being given some exciting and innovative choreography in the form of Flör's *Mc-Kyo* and *Nocturnal Awareness*, they were technically stronger thanks to the rigorous discipline of Willy, and second classer in performance. The whole tenor of the group was pouring away from the not-enough-is-good-enough, slackness and portentous sub-Javanese choreography that had been its staple diet when Dalman was in sole control.

The pinnacle of their endeavour was in their participation in the Australian Opera's *Ring of Passage* of which Flör was director and choreographer. It was this work that brought them to the notice of the whole nation.

Flör left, however, soon after the Adelaide premiere of this work, returning in his resignation speech occurrences

of mutual pressure, questions of authority and lack of support (for him) from the members of the board (a familiar cry in this country). He then became the artistic director of the Dance Company (NSW) and Dalman carried on alone right up to the final disbanding of the company.

Just what precipitated the closing of the company at this juncture (with its flourishing dance academy under Rex Reed) is not quite clear. There were rumours that the company was too far as they had to carry on, and that an artistic cabal within the Donnan Administration had decided that Dalman did not quite fit the artistic image that it was trying to build up. But these are but idle surmises. As far as I can see (and I was dance critic on the *Adelaide Advertiser* for more than two years, so I do have grounds to speak), the dancers had simply outgrown Dalman's concepts and choreographic invention and were disillusioned after the glowing future that seemed to be ahead of them at the notorious opening of *Ring of Passage*. Their performances were lacklustre, the year had gone out of the company.

So the Australian Dance Theatre was defunct as an entity throughout 1976 but plans were still being made.

The absence of a professional dance company was embarrassing and quite unsatisfactory for the cultural people of South Australia, so, when former Ballet Rambert choreographer Jonathan Taylor came out to mount his highly strong (and highly impressive) *Scars End* for Ballet Victoria, strenuous and sincere requests were made to him to become the artistic director of the new Australian Dance Theatre.

He arrived in January of this year and immediately began asking dance, contacting choreographers like Rambert's Norman Morris and Christopher Bruce, to come out and mount works for the company. He brought with him two ex-students of the Rambert company, John Blake and Joseph Scoglio, as ballet mistress and co-director respectively.

Taylor's hopes for the new company are that it will be a small, dynamic group, firmly based on the Martha Graham technique, that is, basically a company of soloists, with diverging strengths and different talents.

Ten of the 13 members of the company are Australian — not bad considering that almost half of Ballet Rambert is Australian and that there are a few others sprinkled liberally through the London Festival Ballet, Royal Ballet and Nederlandse Dans Theatre (You can't tell me we haven't got the talent). In fact,



Taylor himself has noted that Australians despise their talents and shy. He was quite impressed with the energy (albeit somewhat unfocused) that Australian dancers have in these desire to prove themselves, he told me, a drive for discipline, self-discipline and constant.

If he is aware of these strengths (and shortcomings), it seems well for the development of the dancer in his new company. However, building a new company from scratch is extremely laborious and time-consuming. Apart from building up a repertoire for the company (of which more later), he has had to involve himself in such issues as getting proper facilities for the dancers, obtaining a good dancing surface, appointments of stage manager and lighting designer and having meetings with the Danish Administration to outline his policy and plans for the future. From what I gather, that has now all been completed and the company is hard at work learning the ballet for its premiere performance at the new state-owned Her Majesty's Theatre in June.



The company is intent on spreading its influence through three kinds of performance: select performances (such as the three-week June season), experimental or talent-finding workshop performances (as well as outings in-the-round seasons, for which The Space in the Festival Centre will come in useful) and as ambitious schools and university performance programmes. It is a concerted effort to get the dancers before the public in exciting and dynamic works, and to attract young, critical and loyal audiences which no company can do without.

The question of company "image" and "style" is not yet to be discussed, naturally. That will have to wait until public performances are under way. However, because of Taylor's long association with Ballet Rambert, it is expected that the initial seasons will be made up partly of works that have served that excellent company well over the years.

Taylor himself will reproduce his own *For Goodly Space* (in season of the age of Henry VIII), a riddling, barely work that never fails to entertain. *Star's End* (noting that Ballet Victoria is no longer) as well as creating two new works. One new director of Ballet Rambert Norman Maconie will recreate his *Solo* (described as a Woman's Lib work) and a new ballet, *Seven Songs* (music, the songs of the American, arranged by Camille Saint-Saëns). One hopes that it might be possible one day to get Maconie to recreate his mastery *Thou art the Slave* (to Berlioz's *Sinfonia*). Current director of

Rambert Christopher Bruce has reproduced his ballets *Westend*, *Wings* and *They Die in Cello*.

Other works include new ballets by John Chusworth (also ex-Rambert), Julia Blake (*Night of the Four Moons*, music by George Crumb), Joseph Scapino, Scapino and Australian's Dan Aron, who has recently created *Monday is a Cage for the Australian Ballet*.

This appears to be quite an enthusiastic range of titles. And who knows what exciting talent may come out of the company's choreographic season in The Space in November as well as the company's participation in Ballet 77 in Canberra later this year?

But a dance company is only as good as its dancers and, here too the Australian Dance Theatre is strong, with Blake and Scapino dancing, as well as Israel, Pamela Buckman (both ex-Ballet Victoria) and other Australian dancers recently returned from overseas like Cheryl Block, Margaret Wilson (ex-Nederlands Dans Theatre) and Raymond Laver. Teachers for the company include Blake and one of Maria Graham's star dancers, Yumiko Kikawa.

All of this, of course, is under the guidance of Jonathan Taylor, but I don't really have any qualms here. Taylor is an extremely talented and experienced man of the dance, having studied at the Royal Academy and undertaken major roles in the classical ballet repertoire, as well as to work by such modern masters as Gino Tancig. (Would that they could get him out to recreate some works for them, *Macbeth*, say, or *Embrace Tiger and Return to Mountain*).

Taylor is no slouch in other fields, either, having choreographed the musical *The Good Companion* and created film documentaries on Miyuki, Berth Broch and Kurt Weill for the BBC. But it is with the Australian Dance Theatre that his work will be central for the next two years at least, and if he can bring the same enthusiasm and energy (despite the troubles with money, audiences, venues, dancers etc.) to his new company, I think that Australia will witness the rise of a very potent force in contemporary dance.

Adelaide is now firmly in the control (naturally) of Englishmen: at the SATC, the State Opera, the Arts Council and the Festival Centre. This may be cause for concern for some (after all, there is some Australian talent in the administrative and director level in Australia), but if the results are strong, dynamic and worth while, the worries can be laid aside for the time.





La Belle Helene

"... classic proof of the wisdom of concentrating production resources in quarters where they matter most"

One of the greater satisfactions of being a critic of the performing arts is that — just occasionally — one encounters first-hand something so refreshingly building, over with confidence, style, good humour and a sense of genuine artistic accomplishment as the production of Jacques Offenbach's *La Belle Helene* staged by the Victoria State Opera in March.

This *Belle Helene* has been hailed by those who ought to know as a milestone in the development of the Victorian company, not having encountered as work previously. I am unable to judge it within that rarest refrain of all concerts, the general performance standards of the VSO itself. But certainly it was at least the equal, all things considered, of any opera performance I have seen staged in Australia in recent years by anyone other than the Australian Opera itself, and in terms of their entertainment value, it will certainly linger fondly in my memory for many years.

In success was many-faceted, the result of the sort of fortuitous coming together of talents at their best that is the key factor of many stage successes, particularly where some of the performers are of semi-professional standard only and enthusiasts must make do, here and there, in lieu of expertise. Most obviously, there were the key performances of Suzanne Stehle in the title role and Robert Gard as Paris; both must rate very highly among the finest talent available in Australia to undertake such actor-singer roles. Were the A.O. itself to put on *La Belle Helene* this year, it would be hard put to better them as an opening night duo — but then, both sang quite regularly with the national company, anyhow, Stehle as a guest, Gard as a fully-fledged resident artist.

But the deeper successes of this production arose from the behind-the-scenes (or at least off-stage) efforts of the three-member production team, for though there were some very good supporting performances, none of them was really in the same league as Gard and Stehle, nor were the musicians in the pit always absolutely up to coping with the (admittedly stringent) demands of the Offenbach score.

If one were forced to evaluate relatively the achievements of the three members of this particular production team, first

marks would go to Betty Fowder for her direction. For in her fell, inevitably, the task of extracting consistently stylish performances from a very narrow cast some of whom were obviously not all that far above the rank-unclear level. That one was seldom aggressively conscious of this fact reflects great credit on her, and scarcely less on those who appeared on stage, for everyone obviously responded with greater enthusiasm to her direction, even if not always with the utmost of ability.

Richard Davell's contribution, as conductor, was marginally less impressive in scale, perhaps, because Offenbach's effervescent music just about speaks for itself provided that one gets the notes and the tempo more-or-less right. This performance was a good deal better than that, though there were a few technical slip-ups and the lack of subtlety in interpretation that one expects to encounter when a conductor is not a scratch orchestra that has not had the chance to build up a true sense of ensemble over a period. Its performance, on the night I saw *La Belle Helene*, was on the borderline between adequacy and excellence; it was perhaps as good as one can expect any of our orchestras to be when confronted by such a sophisticated score.

It was just to the standard where intensive non-conducting, ensemble rehearsal is required to add the final dash of style that makes for the ultimate in performance: just to the standard where it requires permanence of employment and intensive drilling — for which need, in practical terms, a massive injection of cold, hard cash — if it is ever to get much better.

That I rate Kenneth Russell's design least among the three facets that contributed to the success of this *Belle Helene* is no way reflects on these intrinsic merits. It merely emphasises that the designer of any stage production is, by and large, disadvantaged the immense privilege of being allowed to speak for himself without the intrusion of any intermediary given adequate occasion of art and commerce, as Russell had on this occasion, they can come across equally as well in the amateur production as in the fully professional one.

This *Belle Helene* was classic proof of the wisdom of concentrating one's always limited production resources in the

quarters where they matter most: the physical production was clever, workable and easy to look at without being widely lacking in detail, the casting was strongest where it mattered most, the orchestral backing always spirited and performance, even when it sometimes lacked a measure of the finesse and subtlety it would have been nice to have.

Absolutely the right tone was set for the VSO's *Belle Helene* even before Act I began by the high-hearted front curtain with its central vignette of projections of characters, ancient and Victorian, related to the legend of Helen of Troy, including prominently Jacques Offenbach himself (an inclusion Offenbach would no doubt have approved heartily). This device was repeated during the overture to the other two acts, so the audience was in the right mood for the crazy Offenbachian goings-on each time the curtain went up and the action resumed.

There was more musical humour to accompany the action itself, such as the staid waltzes on the panels of Act I which resolved to become busy female tangoes, and the dialogue was well translated and sufficiently updated by the cold contemporary interpretation so the attention of the audience never faltered. The ensemble singing and singing was of a high standard, too, though there was times when one could have wished either for a good deal more volume from the rarer principals or for more restraint from the pit — at least from where I sat, though I gather that the Melbourne Presses has just as quickly accused us in the Coghlin Theatre with which I am more familiar.

No matter how you look at it, though, the individual triumphs of the Melbourne *Belle Helene* were Suzanne Stehle and Robert Gard. Neither has absolutely the most beautiful operatic voice one can imagine, but in roles like these they are more than adequate: both act superbly and unfailingly get their lines, so matter of spoken or sung, across to an audience — a most important consideration in Offenbach, where so much of the impact depends on the absurdity of some of the text. Most effective among the supporting cast were Russell Smith (Calchas), Ian Cousins (Menelaus) and John Wood (Agamemnon): their line in Act III was a comic gem to pin that thoroughly delighted the audience — and happily so. Maureen Hayward's Clytemnestra and the two Agamemnon of Barry Skelton and Peter Cox also deserve special mention.

Despite the sort of observations expressed above, one is tempted, when

amongst a performance such as this, to push superlatives as if they were going out of fashion in the first flush of enthusiasm it is all too easy to hail the company responsible as the brightest star on the national operatic horizon, threatening all the other regional companies — and perhaps even the AO itself — with imminent collapse. So I hoped it will not be accused too vigorously of being as tasteless, banal as old cynic (or worse, a Sydney showman) might if it were in my competence a little and step short of any such extravagant ascription. It is simply absurd to claim on the basis of one production — no matter how good — that a performing company has suddenly leapt from straggling adolescence to full maturity overnight. The hardest thing of all, in any of the performing arts, is to maintain standards consistently of performing standards night after night, week after week. Without the available chance to achieve ensemble cohesion which is afforded by a great many performances in such year — dozens at least, preferably a hundred or more — it is all but impossible to ensure that the next performance or production will be anything like as good as the last.

Particularly in this case, perhaps, of a repertory opera company, which must be very good — if not excellent — at retaining a wide variety of works in quick succession if it is to qualify as a fully effective cultural asset of the community in service. Big money and suitable administration are absolutely essential to the establishment of an artistically satisfying opera company, but unfortunately, big money and suitable administration do not necessarily result in such a company.

Those who have been closely in touch with the fortunes of the Australian Opera, as they have ebbed and flowed during its childhood and adolescence, will be aware of the fact that it takes every bit as long for an opera company to reach full maturity as for a human baby to grow to adulthood. The AO is 21 this year and its problems, artistic and financial, are far from over yet, though of course it has come an immense way since that ill-fated season of 1956 at the Elizabeth Theatre in suburban Sydney, when the weary wined in the breaches and the outposts of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, overwhelmed by the task to mount the stage boxes on either side.

Looking back over these years, one can recall some of the earlier highlights with nostalgia and painful pride, but the real measure is standards did not, since until after the year's break in the company's activities caused by the Sutherland-Williamson season of 1965. Since then there have been a good many more hits than misses — *God of the Golden West* in 1968, *Pique* in 1971, *Rosencranz and Guildenstern* in 1972, *The Magic Flute* in 1973, *Josqui* in 1974, *André* in 1975, *Barterly* in 1977, to name a few, but their have been low points too — the disastrous *Don Giovanni* of 1974, the awful dance — comedy del

atre programme of 1976 — and a good few productions that have required considerable retooling after being shelved before they achieved sufficient quality to warrant being retained in the repertory. And all this despite a massive injection of subsidy funds on a scale no regional company can hope to receive in the foreseeable future.

Of course, one does not have the chance of infusing one's organisation unless one works on a full-time professional repertory set-up such as that enjoyed by the AO. No Australian regional company can get more than a single short run out of the time and effort and resources poured into preparation of a new production. If the thing doesn't click right from the start, it has to be written off and shelved up to expense. We are only just now, this year, starting to see a little bit of inter-capital touring by the regional last year's Adelaide production of Cimarosa's *Secret Marriage* which went back stock and

which are not fully used. The casting must be done very carefully, and the big problem of arranging an orchestra solved, but surely there must be some imaginative and open-minded management with the guts to take up that gambit and bring such a project to fruition. Or perhaps the leadership, but I rather think there could be financial rewards as well as those artistic ones draped on above.

Brief mention must be made also, this month, of Mused II, which presented a vividly fascinating music theatre programme for two nights at the University of New South Wales's science theatre early in March in third performance scheduled for the recording hall at the Opera House had to be cancelled because of a technical hiccup.

Three of the four works performed were by Australian, and the fourth by the undeniably world-class American composer, John Cage. The Dance Exchange and the Sydney Percussion Ensemble combined to provide the performing forces required. Bill Fontana's *Scaphedral Music No 1* and Alan Hiley's *To a Lost Brother* both had their moments of interest, but the highlights of the evening lay elsewhere.

The theatrical highlight was Jacques Carré's imaginative realisation of the Cage Song Books, with the singer (Bessie McLeod) carried in horizontal and bearing a megaphone by two stage "workmen" and the pianist and accompanist, dressed as Barman and Robin or their ilk, playing draughts in a corner as the music progressed. And McLeod's out gambit, carried off again horizontal by the "workmen" after she started backtracking on a single phrase of nonsense. Her hints of distant sound, even after she was far off stage, provided a notably bizarre climax to a thoroughly entertaining piece.

The final item on the programme, though, Robert Irving's *Gong Gong*, was the unequivocal marked highlight of the evening, thoroughly interesting in the progression of sounds it produced from a wide variety of gongs and drums, the music enhanced by some superb dance movements choreographed by Nareita Hamaï and executed by Jon Karpig, one of those several dancers who exude animal magnetism from every pore, and hence are absolutely fascinating to watch.

Potentially, at least, music-dance-drama programmes such as this, ought to appeal to persons of theatre, opera, ballet and modern dance, unfortunately, they often attract little or no audience at all — perhaps on the ground that such signs of the potential audience is more repelled by the other art forms than attracted to its own. Or perhaps it's just that there it, as yet, no true live theatre audience.

In this case, inadequate advance publicity no doubt, was a good part of the cause for the sparse audience, but even the very best in this field, well served, to achieve a roaring box office success — as others have found to their chagrin.



hurry to the Perth Festival in February of this year, the Melbourne *Belle Helene* I have just been talking about, which was booked night-on by the Adelaide Festival Centre for five performances, three following hand on its eight-performance season at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne (What a bargain they got).

It would have been nice if either or both of these excellent regional productions could also have gone to the Sydney Opera House, perhaps for three or four-performance weekend seasons in the opera house or even the drama theatre, which has a large enough pit to accommodate chamber opera satisfactorily. The problems in arranging such visits are immense, but so are the potential rewards — for performers and audiences alike. And even if they can't be arranged at Rensselaer Point, there are other good scenes available now in Sydney — the Seymour Centre, the new Her Majesty's and the new Theatre Royal. For instance —

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Britten's parables and the return to ritual

"The Prodigal Son is a work to be savoured with deliberation."

As all great dramas in fact do seem to come out of very religious ritual — hence here for a intelligent or unfeeling response if you find one coming on — it is probably inevitable as well as salutary that dramas of all kinds should rebuke itself at the springs of ritual from time to time. We have seen this happen in spoken theatre of the 20th century, and we find it taking place in a quietly fashion in the church parables of Benjamin Britten.

Opera is, by its nature, closer to ritual itself, specifically, song ritual than almost any other form of theatre except the church service itself. Yet it, too, has fallen from time to time into a sacramental realism which may be disturbing and touching but which ultimately would lead to the dissolution of the very qualities which make opera unique and worth cultivating. It would deprive it of that exaltation of moments of passion and heroism which human life which distances it effectively from realism and makes it with a capacity for bearing repeated scrutiny and hearing in which it far surpasses all spoken drama.

Britten's immediate source of stimulus in embarking on his series of three church parables was the experience of seeing Noh dramas in Japan and, specifically, the famous medieval Noh play *Somnambulism*. The first of the parables, *Curlew River*, is in fact a transposition of the basic story of *Somnambulism* to a setting in medieval England. The processions and formal robing and disrobing of Noh dramas are undertaken in this transposed context by an order of monks. The use of stylized half-masks, the disciplined employment of gesture and the connection of using male singers for both male and female parts are also in parallel with Japanese (and other) traditional practice.

Britten has not attempted to write false Japanese music in *Curlew River*, even if at times it seems as though he has. The resemblance, when it does occur, is due to the fact that he is using similar melodic procedures, not similar material. In other words, he is using heterophony (simultaneous variations of a single basic melody) as the tradition of such Eastern music and he is using a melodic source which is a step or two closer to having a pentatonic basis than the conventional major and minor modes. The melody which acts as a theme for the piece in this way is actually a traditional plainchant. The fact does not matter. It is suited by the

monks when they first appear and it follows them into silence at the end. The instrumentalists are part of the brotherhood of the production, and *Curlew River* shatters many of the familiar traditions of opera in order to return to the conventions which at one time were held in veneration by most cultures and religions.

No one who has seen *Curlew River* in performance will forget the theatrical-sacramental impact it makes. Its success encouraged Britten (in partnership with the same librettist, William Plomer) to follow it with *The Burning Fury Furnace*, which retells the biblical story of the three young men of Israel who risk immolation at the orders of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon rather than betray their faith. Although the specific source for the visual presentation of *The Burning Fury Furnace* was the stained glass in Chartres Cathedral, the style and technique are essentially the same as those of *Curlew River*. The seven instrumentalists required for the earlier work (flute, horn, viola, double bass, harp, percussion, chamber organ) receive a single involvement: the player of an alto saxophone. The alto saxophone's tone colour and attack reflect the colours of gold and flame inherent in the parable's Babylonian setting and subject matter. As before, the instrumentalists work in concert with one another and with the singers with the responsibility and sensitivity of chamber players and, therefore, without the guidance of a conductor. As before, the vertical co-ordination of instrumental and vocal lines is loosened. Britten's earlier sign ("v"), which he reused for *Curlew River*, identifies these points of co-ordination in the score where a singer or player will wait for his colleagues when their melodic part has diverged from his.

Curlew River is a tragedy of the most austere kind, the old, damp air of the fen country blows through it and mingles the bleak undertone of its story of a mother's search for the truth of her son's death. *The Burning Fury Furnace*, by contrast, is a rich and warm-blooded score and as appropriately splendid spectacle within the purposed limits of the staging. It strikes less deeply, I think, but compensates for this with greater theatrical diversity and appeal.

The Prodigal Son, which has appeared upon an disc recently (World Record Club release, R 0128, of an original Decca

recording) is different again. Its ritual presentation is drawn from Islamic art this time. Much more significantly, it is a combination of morality play and pastoral. A monastic brotherhood is again summoned to be presenting the parable. The ritual of the opening procession and invocation is broken into, however, by the figure of the Tempter. He is played by the abbot of the brotherhood. To an audience accustomed to the formal and symmetrical opening and closing of the two earlier parables it is a calculated surprise that this sole source of temptation should assert itself before the frame of the work, so to speak, has been completely set in position. The Tempter has the trumpet as an attendant instrument. It plays a single, haunting note. The frame of the two earlier parables is replaced by an alto flute (but continuing to double piccolo), which sounds as soon with the peaceful swarming birds of the pastoral scenes.

All the technical devices employed in *Curlew River* continue to be used in *The Prodigal Son*. Yet the texture is amazingly different in character. *The Prodigal Son*, like most pastorals, is less actually gripping in the theme than its tragic and dramatic predecessors. Its subtle musical procedures and evolving characterisation are particularly suited to conversation and reflecting on a recording as fine as this one.

In addition, prolonged listening to the work reminds us of the complex moral and social issues, quite timeless in their application, raised by its perennially fascinating story. Even if we approve of the idea of reconciliation implicit in the parable, it is only for most people to understand the sentiment of the Elder Son that his beloved and awkward brother should be having his cake and eating it. Some parables are no doubt in the moral points they make that a dramatization of them seems redundant. This one breaks towards a level of insight and wisdom such as few of us can expect to attain or maintain.

The Prodigal Son is a work to be savoured with deliberation. Ideally it should be approached through the two earlier Britten parables, which are also available on single disc recordings of comparable quality, but it will stand on its own, too. The English Opera Group performance under the composer's supervision is not likely to be surpassed and will surely be approached. Disparagements and accusations of surreal opera presentation will mean that the parables are unlikely to be perceived with the special preparation and concentration they need.

Eliza Frazer

"... two of the most boring hours I have spent in a cinema ..."



Eliza Frazer: Producer-director, Tom Barnhill; screenplay, David Williamson; music, Bruce Swenson. A Heritage Production. Stars: Eliza Frazer, Susanah York, David Barnhill, John Waters, Captain Kerry McEvedy, John Penley, Captain Fraser, Noel Fennell, John Graham, Martin Hamblin, Peter France, Trevor Howard.

With Amapu, Gus Marrocco, George Malady, Lindsay Roach, Bruce Spence, Gerald Kennedy, Charles Toppick, Bill Hunter, Sean Sully, Selge Lonsell, Regal Mason, Martin Phelan.

Sweeping into the cinemas on a wave of publicity, *Eliza Frazer* was almost universally greeted by the critics. This much derided blockbuster made a total of around \$1.5 million, was a dud!

David Williamson, scriptwriter, and Tom Barnhill, director, felt obliged to jump to the defence of their film and indignantly pointed out that the film had taken \$1 million at the box office in the first seven weeks of screening. Not long afterwards, the Sydney season's last days were announced. Three months is not a good run for a film that is supposed to be doing so well.

Williamson and Barnhill were suggesting that a movie that can make so much money is a good film. A film that makes \$1 million in a short period is nothing more than a film that has made a lot of money. And the amount of money means no more than a lot of people have been to see it, it tells no judgement on the merits or otherwise of the film.

Presumably a film's first aim is to make money, its second to entertain and/or get across a point of view, and third to be an artistic success. Most films are made for sheer entertainment, to while away a few

hours, and succeed on those narrow grounds others seek to do a little more than be mere relief for the voracious appetite of a bored and bored public.

Tom Barnhill has been attempting to tread this mid-entertainment path since his debacle with the amateurish *Two Thousand Weeks* (broadcast on television). Barnhill has directed some exciting short films, including *The Prize*, but his big time with *Alvin Karpis*, a film of mixed success that was like a more hard-core version of the English *Carry On* films. But it made a lot of money and Tom Barnhill's name became synonymous with local film production.

He tried to repeat his success with a second *Alvin*, though this time he only produced, but it was not to be. His next directing assignment was *Peterman*, another of those yobbo dramas of an actor trying to make a go of it out of his own misdeeds and stuffing it up. It was more like a two-hour cigarette commercial and was panned by the art-house audience and the general public. That Stanley Kubrick thought it was so wonderful was little consolation to the backers.

Then Barnhill tried his hand at a thriller, *And Play It*. It was full of polished performances, good photography and had everything going for it except its waffling plot. The film could not sustain interest and would have been better as a television, which it looked like anyway.

That brings us to *Eliza Frazer*, or to give the film its full title of *Fantasy Warpage of the Captain, Sufferings and Miraculous Escape of Eliza Frazer*. The title is supposed to give a warning of the jolly, bawdy, Tom Jones-ish romp which it is to

follow, and which doesn't.

Period drama is so removed from what Williamson usually writes that he is out of his depth. He is at home in contemporary Australian society, but his script is ill at ease with Victorian-period events and manners. What he has done is drag up those old clichés that have made people laugh for centuries.

Eliza is the pretty wife of the elderly, fat Captain Fraser, a figure of much fat. (It is to Noel Fennell's credit that he manages to make his character human and at times sympathetic.) He is cuckolded by younger and more attractive men, humiliated by his wife both sexually and emotionally, and humiliated by the Aborigines, who deprive him of clothing and kick him in the nose when he won't work. There is, of course, nothing funnier than to see a fat man degraded in this manner, particularly when it is done by some comical black men who dress up in his and his wife's clothes, and the audience howls.

There is also a good sprinkling of nudity through the film. For those that way inclined, there is Amapu, and for the ladies and the gay audience there are various lacking glimpses of John Waters in his buff (though not enough to gain the doctor's wrath and as R. G. Armstrong), and the audience again referred to Mr. Waters wandered around attempting to hide his penis or wearing Mr. York's bloomers.

In case this becomes boring there is a rather pace-breaking shipwreck, flopping, cannibalism and a rather horrendous prison commander (played with much aplomb by Trevor Howard). There is a fast something for everyone in *Eliza Frazer*, but this does not prevent its being two of the most boring hours I have spent in a cinema.

Williamson integrates all the stock characters in his story of film, who is shipwrecked among aborigines, rescued, widowed and who later makes her fortune at travelling side-shows by telling, and embellishing upon, her adventures. In fact there are so many take-away characters it's like a *Who's Who* of local spicing.

Barnhill's director has no sense of period, and the comedy sequences in particular are ponderous. Even the moments of what should have been genuine thrills, the fight sequence (fence under a tent), the shipwreck (poth?), the flight by coach are so pathetically done that I wonder whether Barnhill felt at ease with them.

It's sad that *Eliza Frazer* is bad, it's sad it wastes that mental set of ideas — it's boring.

Five Plays for Stage, Radio and Television

Australian drama study comes of age



Five Plays for Stage, Radio and Television, edited by Alison Sykes. Queensland University Press, Portable Australian Authors Series.

That Australian drama studies have come of age seems to me evident from this new free-ranging anthology of Australian plays. It is quite clearly directed towards the student, as both the small, tight print and Alison Sykes's rather provocative historical analysis of Australian drama indicate. In this respect Queensland University Press's intention is different from that of Currency, which, I believe, has always directed itself primarily to the actor and the performance. It may be that in their zeal to sequence in a range of three-star Australian plays the QUP editors have produced a not quite accessible or both and great for use in educational, but in any case their perspective is different.

The five plays here are Louis Esson's *The Drovers*, Seymour's *The One Day of the Year*, Williamson's *What If You Don't Tomorrow*, Douglas Stewart's *The Golden Lover*, and Ted Roberts's previously unpublished television play *London's Boy*, with letters, interviews and other material relating to these plays. The plays range across the 20th century, beginning with

The Drovers (first published in 1920) and ending with a TV play of the mid-70s. They also range across the three dramatic media of stage, radio and television. Beyond this, however, the editor, Alison Sykes, has not compromised herself into choosing plays according to a fixed pattern or type.

In this respect the volume differs pleasantly from many other anthologies in which plays are linked artificially by theme or, as with the new wave of Catechism publications, by incidents in sociological, cultural or literary history. In this respect, too, Ms Sykes has come down firmly on the side of plays the consistent very good, perhaps the writers' best. Without for a moment suggesting that theatrical or media visibility are ignored in this book, I would say that the focus is generally literary and verbal. The development of authentic Australian speech patterns is also a concern.

It is pleasant, within two months, to be able to comment on the publication of two Louis Esson plays. QUP has done it this time with Esson's classical commedia *The Drovers*, a play often compared with Frey's *Widow to the Sea*. Alison Sykes challenges the reader to ask whether the assumption of this play might not just be the vicarious legitimisation of driving life for city readers. She also dares to suggest that Esson's carefully-wrought "outback" language may not have the authentic ring of later Australian dramatists (and especially David Williamson). While I disagree with her that 1920s drovers would have used very public expressions such as "course the postie", "stink", "my mate", and "blame them", (I have always been struck by the excessively old-world refinement of business in fact), I think she makes an effective case against Esson's "big speecher" as being slightly like in Anthony Miller's recent NIDA production of Esson's *Mother and Son*, and yes, the vivid purple passages and big speeches seemed to work very well. But if the language is questionable, *The Drovers* still remains the most "Apprentice" and the most lucid of Esson's plays — the first straight dramatization of the strange, alien outback myth. So peculiarly local is it that I was once told by some European students that the behaviour of characters in this play was "disgusting" and "callous". The drovers are cracking jokes as their friend Bingley Bell prepares to die in the desert,

and to me the humour has always seemed absolutely true.

Stations and human relations of the sheep land do not seem reach as evidence with *The One Day of the Year*, and *What If*, both of which illustrate the debt to Australian cultural emphasis from bush to city and from lower to upper classes. Certainly Seymour's play still reads well, and indeed, as Ms Sykes points out, in conclusion as which the young hero capitulates, rings truer than does the end of *The One Day*. It is also a fine play to examine in contrast with the other stage plays. The account of the arc read mainly by *The One Day* makes amusing if surprising reading. I would imagine that for students of Australian drama the move from Seymour's latest sketches to Williamson's earlier environment in *What If* or *You Don't Tomorrow* will be worth examining, particularly as Seymour has attempted a North Shore character in his play with no great success.

The editor's justification for including Douglas Stewart's New Zealand-set play *The Golden Lover* rather than the Australian *New Kelly* is quite persuasive — she thinks it is Stewart's best play. She uses the occasion, moreover, to point up the differences between radio drama and other kinds of play, and examines Professor Harold Clive's contention that "the radio play has one great defect, that the characters in it never talk". I thought this was especially timely, coming at a time just when many people in the theatre are beginning to reject the Australian cult of non-verbal theatre. I think particularly of John Bell's recent programme notes to Louis Newman's *Inner Pleasure*, in which he makes a plea for lyrics and attendant drama. The variety of radio drama as analysed by Ms Sykes, are of course just such verbal acts.

In the light of her remarks about audio drama, Ms Sykes's special area of interest, it is a pity that she could not have dwelt a greater length on the special qualities of television drama. She does explain why she has chosen the Ted Roberts play, and points to the dominance of unspoken action and reaction, but notes that action of her introduction will be the most provocative for school students studying the different media, since further analysis would have been useful. As it is, she does ask most of the significant questions about writing for the different media, and if I am right, that the schools will find this an excellent text for such studies, then perhaps questions are more important than answers.

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